

This report has been submitted by Mahrukh Shaukat (Helpline Development Officer) and Ghizala Avan (Program Manager) at Amina MWRC.

It is a summary of qualitative findings from key pieces of community engagement at Amina MWRC, throughout the funding period 2017-2019. Amina MWRC is an organisation working to promote inclusion and empowerment of Muslim women and BME women in Scotland.

Summary

Our consultations have taken different forms over the period 2017-2019.

Amina was funded to carry out community focus groups which varied in size, in around 10 locations in Scotland. We are currently researching how we can improve faith literacy of women's aid organisations by conducting workshops around what it means to be a woman of faith.

In addition to this we also took part in Lord Bracadale's consultations on hate crime legislation; conducted our own survey and, more recently, were involved in the consultation on the definition of Islamophobia.

Consequently, the results were varied. However, by accessing over 300 women we can confidently put forward some qualitative trends and key observations from the work.

i/ The current nature and extent of Islamophobia in Scotland (including gendered Islamophobia and intersections with other prejudices)

It is to be noted that our record of reported hate crimes as a 3rd party reporting centre still number < 10 over the period. The majority of our knowledge has been extracted through our interactions with women during consultations and focus groups with staff and communities. Almost all of the participants were BME Muslim women.

All focus groups shared opinions on Islamophobia but the number of specific incidents stayed between 0 - 3 except in Perth where there seemed to be a concentration in hate crime experienced both online and in person.

A list of ways in which people have recognised Islamophobia are as follows:

- Pockets of people who treat us differently
- Name calling (often racialised and aggressive - " So what if she is pregnant, may the baby will die and it's one less Paki in the world")
- Hijab pulling
- Threats of acid attack
- Abuse shouted from cars
- Random checks: Asian boys targeted as suspicious
- Small community- fear of repercussions
- People tell each other but don't often see the point of taking it further.

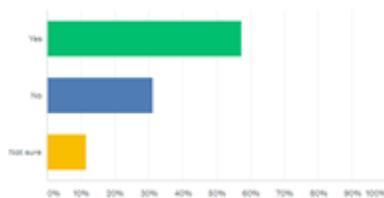
- People who own businesses have been threatened and abused often to a violent degree but this can be conflated largely with racism. Different attitudes towards men and women i.e. men seen as more dangerous because of how they're seen to treat women and women are seen as more uneducated and weak.
- Islamophobia is obviously affected by media coverage.
- Exclusion from neighbours
- Classroom racism
 1. not treated fairly by teachers
 2. bullied by classmates
 3. overcompensation by teachers when justifying islamophobic behaviour
- Religion is stereotyped not understood
- Public transport was mentioned several times as a place where people can be made to feel less than and isolated. Buses and taxis mentioned more than trains.
- Even when reporting is done the process takes a long time and often results in small fines or community service.
- The social media threshold for identifying a hate crime is might higher but the impact is as significant

Survey Results:

Amina MWRC put together a survey to capture some trends around the experiences of Islamophobia in Scotland with a different audience. Below are some of our more

In the last two years, have you experienced or witnessed any form of hate or mistreatment because of being Muslim?

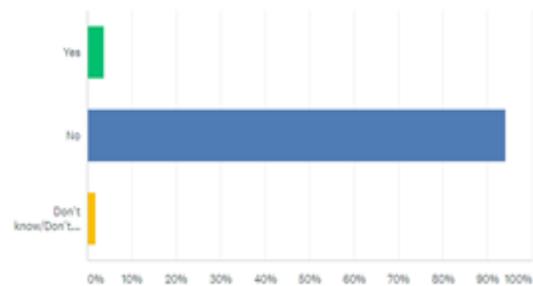
Answered: 183 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	57.38% 105
No	21.36% 37
Not sure	11.42% 21
TOTAL	183

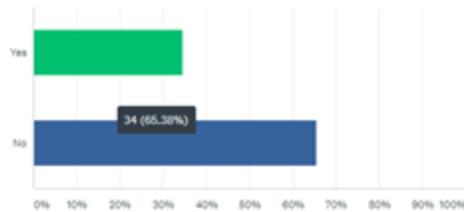
Did someone help you?

Answered: 52 Skipped: 135



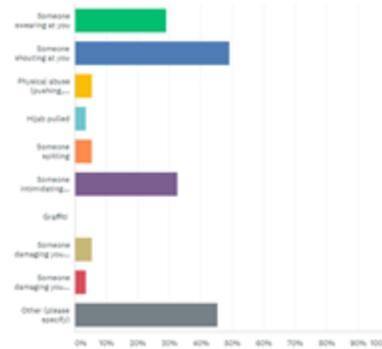
Did you report this incident?

Answered: 52 Skipped: 135



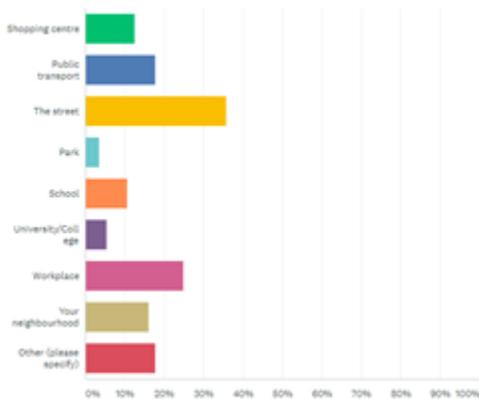
Can you describe what happened to you?

Answered: 55 Skipped: 122



If yes, where did this incident happen to you?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 121



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Someone entering at job	25.00% 12
Someone shouting at job	45.00% 21
Physical abuse (pushing, hitting)	5.45% 3
Hijab pulled	3.64% 2
Someone spitting	5.45% 3
Someone intimidating you	35.73% 16
Graffiti	0.00% 0
Someone damaging your car (vandalism)	5.45% 3
Someone damaging your property (vandalism)	3.64% 2
Other (please specify)	45.45% 20
Total Respondents: 55	

Additional notes:

Under current legislation hate crime must be assigned only one protected characteristic which is considered problematic in terms of reporting. Although we observed a consensus that media portrayal of Muslims has been inherently negative, the references to ethnicity and nationality in the majority of recent press had embedded the idea of race being an integral factor.

Responses from women who weren't observing hijab included feeling the need to smile wider on the street or to show solidarity against terrorism after attacks which showed the threat against people of colour more broadly.

Visibly Muslim women in the focus groups typically showed a greater level of caution in the recognition that they were standing out even more. A few had reported their husband's fear for their daughters to leave the house and wear hijab and some niqab wearing women had opted to remove the face veil in the face of the added animosity and microaggressions.

With overlapping patriarchy, the value of Muslim woman's voice can be further degraded with the pervasive stereotyping of their "submission" and obedience, often related to the expressions of modesty and family values that can be upheld more strongly in particular cultures or religious family homes.

Islamophobia as a more ideological phenomenon can be seen to exist also but this might be found in more academic spaces where the hegemony of secular research and learning is more established. The theme of education as a means to combat Islamophobia has been prevalent in all of the discussions.

Some conversations amongst refugee communities in Dundee or Dumfries and our most multicultural group in Aberdeen showed that Islamophobia was either not something that people understood or would use to describe their experiences and, on reflection, was also a lesser concern to them given the immediacy of their day to day lives. In rural Dumfries for example not being able to understand bus timetables and public transport was a greater risk to their feeling of discomfort and safety. In Aberdeen, there was discussion on the feeling of displacement as a migrant community and what impact this had on their lives and confidence. In Glasgow a feeling of division within the Muslim community that made them feel weaker as a counteractive force.

People are afraid to report in case it reflects badly on the community i.e. "some communities causing extra bother all the time" or cause their family hassle.

One of our focus groups had a dominant, positive voice when discussing their area but we had conversations from a few attendees afterwards who said that they didn't feel comfortable disagreeing in front of everyone but that she had been threatened with an acid attack and shouted at on the street.

ii/ The steps you believe could be taken to challenge and overcome Islamophobia

1. A definition of Islamophobia

"The function of Amina and scot government is that you are a citizen of this country and should something happen, that you can lean on our institutions"

To help with police training, equalities policy and to increase reporting it would be useful to have a definition of Islamophobia as understood by government and the law. The lack of distinction between free speech and discriminatory behaviour should be made clear through this and help victims to hold those in authority to account to prevent institutional Islamophobia from becoming further embedded.

2. The process of consultation needs to be more inclusive

"If we involve people in the solution making process, you'll make a change"

Amina was consulted on the format and wording of the women only hate crime consultation by Scottish Government. Despite our significant experience with a range of communities our feedback was taken on board.

The questions and the manner of facilitation heavily relied on participants who are highly informed on social issues, which is not representative of any population or community.

One of the main themes of the feedback we've received is that people felt as though their points were not captured, interpreted or summarised in a way which truly reflected what they were trying to say. Nor did participants feel that they understood what Scottish Government had needed from them.

After having confirmed that it was a working definition and thinking they were supposed to be suggesting changes, it later seemed as though they had been unknowingly engaged in a more specific debate for the definition's appropriation or expulsion. This should have been made clearer as some participants now have less faith in the process.

People also felt as though they needed more time and context in order to relate their ideas most effectively. If the agenda was to build a consensus evidencing the need for Scotland to create its own definition, there could have been an opportunity for the community to share their ideas directly before the APPG definition was introduced in the session.

The timing of the sessions prevented women in employment, an area where many might face discrimination, from attending.

There were also issues around a lack of trust that this definition would be useful. These more challenging points often hinted at the pervasiveness of Islamophobia at a cultural level including, but not limited to, challenges at work, in education and media depiction of Muslims. The idea that Islamophobia is not just isolated incidents of violence or abuse but a systemic, learned bias is evidenced through testimony but these factors were not given more weight despite their continued mention.

3. Locally focused development

"--- should hold an event for the community and allow people to share their fears and come up with how to deal with it collectively"

Experiences of Islamophobia can vary depending on a variety of factors and can be subsumed by other community challenges. Local support and trust building could help to get in-depth knowledge of the systems of Islamophobia.

Participants have commented that a focus on victimisation can be disempowering and a solution focused approach can combat this.

4. Examination of islamophobia as a structural issue

"I would be tired if I dealt with every micro aggression"

a) Anti-discriminatory training

b) Inclusion strategies for private/public/voluntary organisations

c) Educational reform:

- recognition of religion as relevant for many scots

- equipping teachers to address difference within their classrooms, including how to challenge hate speech
- opportunities to experience and acknowledge religious practices
- studying the history of religion