Report of the inquiry into Islamophobia in Scotland by the Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia

Scotland’s Islamophobia

Peter Hopkins
Foreword by Anas Sarwar MSP

Growing up in Glasgow as the son of Britain’s first Muslim Member of Parliament, I witnessed abhorrent racism aimed at my family, my friends, and the Scots Asian community.

As a family, we learnt to be resilient.

My Mum used to tell me that these people want us to walk away, and the way we defeat them is by staying and fighting for what we believe.

When I chose to enter public service, first as a dentist and then as a politician, I continued to face racism – including in the 2017 Scottish Labour leadership election. Racism from within my own political party.

Some months later, I took the decision to speak out about this publicly for the first time. That didn’t stop the hatred or the death threats. But it did make me determined to tackle hatred and prejudice.

I established Holyrood’s Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia, bringing together politicians from all parties.

This is much bigger than one political party, and we must work together if we are to challenge everyday racism and Islamophobia.

The CPG has quickly grown to become the largest in the Scottish Parliament, and I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved.

We identified five workstreams: hate crimes; education; employment; women; and the media.

We invited newspaper and TV editors to address the group in the first roundtable event of its kind, ultimately producing new media guidelines for journalists across the UK.

We also worked with Scotland’s main political parties to adopt a formal working definition of Islamophobia in a landmark bid to tackle prejudice.

And our work culminated in the launch of the first ever public inquiry into Islamophobia in Scotland, with the findings presented here in this extensive report.

I want to thank Professor Peter Hopkins for his work on this vitally important publication, and everyone who took the time to engage with the inquiry.

This document is not an easy read.

So imagine what it is like for everyone who has faced the Islamophobia detailed in these pages.

We pride ourselves on being a welcome and tolerant country, but it’s clear how much more work we have to do.

There are people in Scotland who feel scared to leave their homes for fear of verbal or physical attack; are withdrawing from public services with devastating knock-on consequences on their health and education; and feel they are outsiders in their own country.

This should shame us all.

It is clear to me that we must redouble efforts to challenge and overcome hatred and prejudice.

This requires politicians to come together on a cross-party basis, because the fight against hate is a fight for all of us.

Chair of the Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia

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Summary of recommendations

Islamophobia in Scotland
- The Scottish Government should work to address the shortfall in data about Islamophobia in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should fund research and projects that adopt an intersectional approach to Islamophobia.
- The Scottish Government and other authorities should pay specific attention to improving the analysis of the intersections of religious and racial discrimination.
- The Scottish Government should work towards adopting a formal definition of Islamophobia to promote understanding, to encourage reporting and to indicate their commitment to addressing it.

Gendered Islamophobia
- All initiatives about Islamophobia in Scotland must pay specific attention to its gendered nature.

Misrecognition and Islamophobia
- Include in all training on countering Islamophobia an acknowledgement that people from diverse ethnicities and religious backgrounds can experience Islamophobia, as they may be mistaken for being Muslim.

Reporting Islamophobia
- The Scottish Government should actively support initiatives to recruit more officers from within Scotland’s diverse communities, including Muslim officers, into Police Scotland.
- Require all local authorities, schools and Police Scotland to ensure that all officers are regularly provided with high-quality training on countering Islamophobia.
- The Scottish Government should fund awareness-raising programmes about the safe reporting of Islamophobia.
- The Scottish Government should review all legislation relevant to Islamophobia and adjust this where appropriate to ensure the full inclusion of Islamophobia within this.
- The Scottish Government should fund restorative justice initiatives to work with offenders.
- Promote and encourage the reporting of Islamophobic incidents, with support offered to victims.

Factors Enabling Islamophobia
- The Scottish Government, all leaders of political parties and Council leaders should be proactive in taking a public stance against Islamophobia.
- The Scottish Government should instigate an independent review into Islamophobia in Scotland.
- The Scottish Government should integrate considerations about Islamophobia into the ongoing work of the Race Equality Framework.
- The Scottish Government should work to ensure the appointment of Muslims to public boards, advisory groups and other senior positions.
- The Scottish Government should provide funding for initiatives, organisations and agencies that challenge Islamophobia and racism.
- Given the weight of evidence against ‘Prevent’, Schedule 7 and related counter-terrorism legislation, the Scottish Government should take steps to encourage the withdrawal of these and related strategies.

Islamophobia and the Media
- Require editors and journalists to endorse and proactively use the CPG media guidelines.
- Require all journalists in Scotland to participate in regular and compulsory training on the role that the media play in fostering Islamophobia. This should include the use of visual imagery.
- Require all editors to consult regularly with the Muslim community in order to promote understanding and prevent misrepresentation.
- Actively promote careers in journalism to graduates within Scotland’s diverse communities.
Islamophobia and education

- The Scottish Government should fund and support initiatives that educate the people of Scotland about the damage that Islamophobia does to Scottish society.
- The Scottish Government should fund and support initiatives that demonstrate the positive contributions of Scotland’s Muslim population to Scottish society, politics, culture and history.
- Integrate an understanding of Islamophobia into compulsory components of the Scottish education curricula and all teacher training education.
- Provide all teachers and lecturers in Scotland regularly with compulsory training to counter Islamophobia.
- Require all educational institutions to create safe spaces for discussion, prayer and reflection.
- Require schools to establish dress-code policies that are sensitive to the needs of Muslims.
- Encourage colleges and universities to establish links with employers with a good and/or leading record for diversity and championing ethnic diversity and anti-racist initiatives/policies.
- Conduct a review of Education Scotland’s framework, ‘How Good is Our School’.
- The Scottish Government should ensure that the Public Sector Equality Duty is enforced in schools and provide additional training so that this can be better implemented and enforced.
- Encourage COSLA to develop and implement appropriate programmes of race equality in the school workforce.
- Improve the reporting and recording of Islamophobia in schools.
- Scrutinise Education Scotland and the Race Equality Action Plan to see where improvements can be made.

Islamophobia and Employment

- Develop a workplace discrimination toolkit to aid in the identification and combatting of Islamophobia in the workplace.
- Include representatives from Scotland’s diverse communities – where possible – on interview panels in the workplace.
- The Scottish Government should pay specific and ongoing attention to issues relating to ethnic and religious health inequalities, employment experiences and poverty.
- Require the STUC to develop a comprehensive strategy to challenge Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice in Scottish workplaces.
- Promote the creation and enforcement of ‘dignity at work’ policies that pay specific attention to Islamophobia.

Islamophobia and health, well-being and housing

- Include training to counter Islamophobia and its impact in all education for medical and health professionals.
- Include training to counter Islamophobia and its impact in all education provided to mental health professionals and organisations.
- NHS training should include material on Islamophobia and its impact on NHS doctors, nurses, staff and patients.

Politics and participation

- The Scottish Government should promote the positive contributions of Muslim politicians and leaders so that these role models are made visible to current and future generations.
- All political parties in Scotland, at all levels, should proactively adopt a ‘no tolerance’ approach to Islamophobia.

Everyday Life

- The Scottish Government should fund and support organisations and initiatives that promote social cohesion and integration, particularly for Muslim women.
1. Introduction

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims inquiry to establish a working definition of Islamophobia notes that ‘Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness’ (APPG, 2017: 1). This definition is endorsed by all political parties in the Scottish Parliament. The Runnymede Trust clarifies that ‘Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism’ (Elahi & Khan, 2017: 1) and offers a longer version that uses the United Nations’ definition of racism:

Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. (p.1)

This inquiry recognises Islamophobia as a form of anti-Muslim racism that targets Muslims and those who are misrecognised as Muslim.

The Muslim population in Scotland increased from 42,557 in 2001 to 76,737 in 2011, representing an 80% increase over 10 years, and 75% reside in the three Scottish parliamentary regions of Glasgow (43.6%), Lothians (19.1%) and North East Scotland (18.4%). Of all Muslims in Scotland, 71% consider their only national identity to be Scottish or British (for any combination of UK identities). The Muslim population in Scotland is youthful, compared to the overall population (Elshayyal, 2016; Hopkins, 2017). Scottish Muslims are an ethnically diverse population - and increasingly so. While the majority of Scottish Muslims are of South Asian ethnic heritage (65%), the proportion is decreasing over time as more are identifying as Black African. Muslims constitute nearly 40% of the Scottish Asian population, 15% of the ‘Black’ category and over 80% of the Arab population. Muslims constitute 33.5% of the black and minority ethnic (BME) population (total 211,000); around 92% of Scottish Muslims are classified as BME (Elshayyal, 2016; Hopkins, 2017).

Racism and Islamophobia: Addressing Scottish exceptionalism

Miles and Dunlop (1987) observed that political processes had not been racialised in Scotland as they had in England. They also pointed out that the sectarian divide between Catholics and Protestants in Scotland tended to be the focus of attention, meaning that issues such as racism against South Asians were side-lined or overlooked. Furthermore, although there have been important initiatives that celebrate diversity, such as One Scotland, Many Cultures, relatively little attention has been paid to addressing racism (Arshad, 2016).

This earlier work was followed by research on young Muslim men’s negotiations of racism (Hopkins, 2007) and the way in which racism restricts ethnic minority entrepreneurs’ access to business opportunities (Ishaq et al., 2013). Studies focused on victimisation in relation to racist violence in Scotland, including the use of racist language and slogans (Covali & Frondigoû, 2013) and the need for greater attention to the connections between race equality and anti-poverty initiatives,
given the evidence that many ethnic minorities in Scotland find themselves in poverty (CRER, 2020; Netto, 2016). In 2014 to 2019, Muslim adults were more likely to live in relative poverty (49%) than adults overall (38%), after housing costs were taken into account (Scottish Government, 2020), and although BME people in Scotland are twice as likely as white Scots to experience poverty, anti-poverty initiatives rarely consider race as a key factor (CRER, 2020). In a review for the Scottish Government, Kidd & Jamieson (2018) observed that racism and discrimination were key concerns for Scotland’s Muslim community, yet the focus on issues of racism continues to be of marginal concern in Scotland. Only a few years ago now, Davidson et al. (2018) published a new collection of essays on racism in Scotland in which the idea that there is ‘no problem here’ was still being challenged.

In Scotland, it was only in the mid-2000s that Islamophobia started being referred to as an issue. Through an analysis of 12 focus groups and 1,510 telephone surveys, Hussain and Miller (2006) explored the issue of both Islamophobia and Anglophobia in Scotland: one-third of majority Scots felt some economic resentment toward Muslims; half said that Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims came to live here; half expressed doubt over Muslims’ commitment to Scotland; and four-fifths felt that Muslims’ first loyalty lies outside Scotland (Hussain & Miller, 2006). Shortly following this survey, the issues of Islamophobia and racism were identified as key factors in shaping young Muslim men’s sense of political participation (Hopkins, 2007).

More recently, Blackwood et al. (2013) have reflected on the role of racism and Islamophobia in Muslims’ encounters with airport authorities, and Bagheri (2018) explores experiences of Islamophobia in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen. It is observed that it is not only Muslims who experience Islamophobia; those mistaken for being Muslim also recount their experiences of it (Hopkins, 2014; Hopkins et al., 2017; Scottish Executive 2002). Furthermore, Botterill et al. (2016) observe how everyday experiences of Islamophobia undermined the discourse on multiculturalism and inclusion for ethnic minorities promoted during the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014 (see also Botterill et al 2017, 2019). Finlay et al. (2017) find that Islamophobia shapes young Muslim’s engagements with politics in Scotland; some withdraw from participation due to concerns about Islamophobia, while others are motivated to engage in order to resist and overcome their marginalisation (Finlay & Hopkins, 2020).

The intersections of gender, race, religion and class have received attention (Finlay & Hopkins, 2019); furthermore, Bonino (2020) outlines several Islamophobic incidents that have taken place in Scotland in recent decades. Even although all this research has been undertaken, Scottish exceptionalism persists. Harris (2018: 114) refers to the ways in which Scotland ‘has sustained a remarkable level of avoidance in regard to discussions of race and racism, and analysis of Islamophobia in Scotland has been very limited’. In view of the limited attempts until then, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (Scottish Government, 2015) provided additional evidence of the need to address Islamophobia. Of all its survey respondents, 65% thought that an employer should be able to insist that a Muslim woman removed her veil while at work, and 41% agreed or strongly agreed that Scotland would begin to lose its identity if more Muslims were to come to live in Scotland. Some may see Scotland’s race equality framework (Scottish Government, 2016) as a step in the right direction; however, neither this document, nor the action plan for 2017-2021 (Scottish Government, 2017), makes any mention of Islamophobia. This silence demonstrates the serious lack of significance afforded by Scottish policymakers to the issue of Islamophobia.

11. Background to the inquiry

In view of this Scottish exceptionalism, the Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Tackling Islamophobia organised an inquiry into the issue of Islamophobia in Scotland. This included an online survey and invited submissions of written evidence. The terms of reference for the inquiry asked individuals and organisations about the nature and extent of Islamophobia in Scotland, the role of the media, the impact on children, young people and families and what steps could be taken to challenge and overcome Islamophobia.

A total of 447 respondents completed the online survey. 43% of whom identify as female and 56% as male. The age of respondents ranges from 13 to 87 years, with 17% aged under 30, 57% aged 30 to 50 and 25% aged 51 and over. Of the respondents, 78% identify with the Islamic faith, and of these 57% are male and 43% are female. Just under 60% of respondents have a Glasgow postcode and 16% an Edinburgh postcode, and there are several responses from Aberdeen, Dundee, Falkirk, Kirkcaldy and Motherwell. A total of 15 written submissions were received from organisations and agencies in Scotland. These include submissions from voluntary sector organisations, anti-racist and faith groups, and educational institutions and organisations.

The survey responses and written submissions have been analysed in depth to identify key trends and themes. We quote directly from both forms of the data and have anonymised the direct quotations from the survey responses. Several survey responses and one written submission were explicitly racist and Islamophobic in nature.
2. Islamophobia in Scotland

In the survey, 75% of Muslims say that Islamophobia is a regular or everyday issue in Scottish society. There is a balance of gender in response to this question. Respondents from Glasgow are slightly more likely to report Islamophobia as a regular or everyday issue than those living in other parts of Scotland. Younger groups are more likely to report that Islamophobia is an everyday issue for them than the over-50s.

Of the working age respondents (18–65), almost three-quarters (74%) report that Islamophobia is an everyday or regular issue for them. Slightly fewer (73%) of the 30 to 50 years group report that it is so. In the 51 years and above age group, 78% report this, and it is also this group that is least likely (51%) to report that Islamophobia is only an occasional issue for them. The 66 years and above group is most likely to report that it is not an issue for them at all.

Of all respondents, 75% state that Islamophobia is getting worse, 20% that it is staying the same and only 5% that it is declining. Of the Muslim respondents, 78% say that Islamophobia is getting worse, and this rises to 82% of Muslim respondents with a Glasgow postcode. There is a general sense among participants that this increase is felt across many diverse communities, as this quote illustrates:

‘I haven’t heard anything to say it’s getting better or worse.

Many of the written submissions point to the lack of a solid evidence base on Islamophobia in Scotland. Both Scotland Against Criminalising Communities (SACC) and the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CREER) point to the lack of the intersections of race and religion with other relevant variables.

Quantitative data on Islamophobia is Scotland is scarce. Much of the data - include police figures for hate crime - relates to broadly defined racism, from which data on Islamophobia cannot be extracted. But various surveys, including work on Islamophobia in schools, suggest that Islamophobic abuse and discrimination is a commonplace experience for Scottish Muslims. This accords with the experiences of Muslims involved in SACC.

No data is available on Schedule 7 Step and Question rate questions in Scotland, or on the ethnicity/religious background of those questioned. Questioning at Scottish airports seems to be a fairly common experience for Muslim travellers and very rare for non-Muslims. In a study of people questioned at an English airport, 88% of respondents questioned on arrival were Muslim (Langley 2014). In a survey by campaigning group Cage, all but one out of 201 people questioned were Muslim (Cage 2019). (SACC)

A significant barrier to addressing anti-Muslim hatred (as well as broader areas of race equality) in Scotland is the lack of available intersectional research and/or data relating to ethnicity and religion. In noting the need to develop an intersectional approach to equality research in Scotland, Advance HE (previously the Equality Challenge Unit) has highlighted that this type of research ‘provides an understanding of the issues that is closer to the lived experiences of the equality groups that you are interested in, thus allowing you to develop effective strategies to address them’. (CREER)

2.1. Where does Islamophobia take place?

The options presented for the survey question on the location of Islamophobia are: damage to buildings or property; at work; at school; at college or university; in the street; in a public building such a shop, restaurant or pub; on public transport; or other. Many respondents selected ‘All of the above’. Everywhere or Multiple places. The street is the location most commonly referred to (115 responses) and this is also the case in the evidence submitted by AMINA – Muslim Women’s Resources Centre (AMINA). Next comes public spaces such as shops or restaurants (46) and public transport (40). Then at work (27) and places of education (29). Car parks (3), driving (1), home (2) and online (2) are also mentioned. Of all respondents, 31% have experienced Islamophobia at work, 18% at school and 13% at college or university. Of those aged 29 years and under, 45% recall incidents of Islamophobia at school, and this falls to 29% at college or university.

The submission from TelMAMA points to airports as a place where Islamophobic incidents are reported:

in one case reported to TelMAMA in September 2019, two middle-aged Pakistani flight attendants were briefly detained by police at Glasgow Airport after staff working at a different airline had reported ‘two suspicious Asian men boarding a flight’. They were passing through when they decided to open their suitcases and put on their work uniforms, unaware that they were being viewed with suspicion. It caused them much distress and humiliation due to the public nature of the arrest, as it was in front of colleagues and passengers. (TelMAMA)

Such comments correspond to Scottish exceptionalism (e.g. Arshad, 2016; Harris, 2018; Hopkins, 2016) and the idea that Scotland is free from racism; however, the responses to this inquiry show that this is not the case.

Some responses focus on the lack of sufficient data and evidence about Islamophobia. This led some to say:

We feel that the environment has become more and more hostile for our communities, especially for our Muslim clients. Brexit most definitely has not helped. It has given a bigger voice to those who hate and even an excuse to promote their hate. ALL BME communities are suffering. Under reporting of hate crime is a major issue. Communities need reassurance that HELP is available, and perpetrators will be dealt with by the law.

A small number of participants state that Islamophobia is declining in Scotland. A number of these are from Islamophobic, far-right respondents; others contest the very term of Islamophobia yet contradict themselves by pointing out that they think that it is declining. Some note that they feel that Islamophobia is less of an issue than in England.

I don’t think it’s as bad in Scotland as England as – on the whole – Scottish citizens embrace all nationalities and cultures.

We have seen many attacks on Muslim businesses and individuals, often in response to events in other parts of the world. For example, there have been hate attacks on mosques and Muslims in retaliation. These have included attacks on people’s property, such as killing a Muslim neighbour by threatening to burn down their house. These attacks have been motivated by a desire to punish Muslims for events that happen elsewhere.

I haven’t heard anything to say it’s getting better or worse.

Many of the written submissions point to the lack of a solid evidence base on Islamophobia in Scotland. Both Scotland Against Criminalising Communities (SACC) and the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CREER) point to the lack of the intersections of race and religion with other relevant variables.

Quantitative data on Islamophobia is Scotland is scarce. Much of the data - include police figures for hate crime - relates to broadly defined racism, from which data on Islamophobia cannot be extracted. But various surveys, including work on Islamophobia in schools, suggest that Islamophobic abuse and discrimination is a commonplace experience for Scottish Muslims. This accords with the experiences of Muslims involved in SACC.

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Academics have analysed the impact that the everyday nature of securitisation and the nurturing of hypervigilance has on communities. Moreover, research with Scottish Muslims has demonstrated the ways in which their encounters with airport authorities result in their affiliation to Scotland being questioned, threatening their sense of respectability and their understanding of themselves as good Muslims (Blackwood et al., 2013).

Glasgow is identified as somewhere that Islamophobia is getting worse:

There are many incidents occurring, especially in Glasgow and also in schools.

For years, my friends and I know not to take the underground on the days that Rangers are playing a football match. But more recently, we have to think twice before going out alone or going out after dark or going to certain areas in Glasgow. When people have nothing to lose then they don’t care if they get arrested for violence against someone they perceive as being from the Islamic faith.

2.2. What should change?

Several written submissions indicate that the Scottish Government needs to take a lead in collecting, collating and publishing robust data on the extent and nature of Islamophobia in Scotland. While some submissions acknowledge this survey and inquiry as a positive first step, they point to the need for a clear, coherent methodology of data collection to inform the APPG’s ongoing deliberations on British Muslims and the Government.

This is difficult question to answer without any hard evidence either way, therefore we have selected the middle option, ‘staying the same’, but suspect it is ‘getting worse’. It may be that the views of the Scottish public have already been harnessed regarding the issue of Islamophobia via The Scottish Household Survey and, if not, then there would be merit in getting some hard data to support or challenge our perceptions. Police Scotland have a role in recording hate crime, and this could also be used as evidence to support or mitigate the views above. Our perception that Islamophobia is ‘getting worse’ is largely due to the negative media portrayal/reporting of practising Muslims being linked to terrorist activity and the subsequent attacks on mosques and Muslims in retaliation. These have
3. Experiences of Islamophobia

The process of consultation needs to be more inclusive. (AMINA)

Recommenions:
The Scottish Government should work to address the shortfall in data about Islamophobia in Scotland.

The Scottish Government should fund research and projects that adopt an intersectional approach to Islamophobia.

The Scottish Government and other authorities should pay specific attention to improving the analysis of the intersections of religious and racial discrimination.

The Scottish Government should work towards adopting a formal definition of Islamophobia to promote understanding, to encourage reporting and to indicate their commitment to addressing it.

Of those Muslims who completed the survey, 83% have experienced Islamophobia directly. Verbal abuse is the most frequently mentioned form (66%), while 30% have experienced abuse on social media, 16% damage to buildings or property and 16% physical assault. Muslim respondents are generally more likely to report verbal abuse and damage to buildings and property than respondents overall. Furthermore, Muslim respondents are far more likely to report experiencing Islamophobia in the workplace and at school than the overall sample.

Women are significantly less likely to experience physical assault (11%) than men (27%). Similarly, women are less likely to experience social media abuse (26%) than men, for whom it is 40%. Similar proportions of women and men have experienced abuse at work (43% and 49%). Older people are significantly less likely to have experienced verbal abuse or physical assault.

Over 80% of all Muslim respondents to the survey have a friend or family member who has experienced Islamophobia. Verbal abuse is by far the most common form of Islamophobia that respondents say that family or friends have experienced, with 93% of respondents selecting this option. Moreover, one-third of respondents’ relatives or friends are reported to have been victims of Islamophobia through physical assault or via insults on social media. Muslim women are more likely to encounter Islamophobia than men: 56% of survey responses say that women are at most risk, and 58% of Glasgow residents think that women are at greater risk of experiencing Islamophobia. Older respondents are more likely to respond that the risk is the same for both men and women – 49% of those aged 51 and above and 52% of those aged 66 and above state that the risk is the same, which is a greater percentage than of any other group.

Those of a South Asian heritage are at greatest risk of experiencing Islamophobia, followed closely by those with an Arabic background. Those who are white or Eastern European are regarded as the least likely to experience Islamophobia. When considering whether appearance can put a person at greater risk of Islamophobia, respondents believe that those wearing a headscarf or hair covering are most at risk (93%), followed by those wearing ‘Arab’ clothes (77%), however, having brown skin (76%), a beard (73%) and/or attending a mosque (68%) also attract high numbers of positive responses. It is concerning that the AMINA submission, through its survey on experiences of Islamophobia, has found that in over 90% of incidents no one intervenes.

We now document the main forms that Islamophobia takes in Scotland.

3.1. Verbal and physical abuse

Respondents feel that Islamophobia in the form of increased verbal and physical assault is intensifying, and 65% of Glasgow residents report experiencing verbal abuse, compared to 52% of those living outside Glasgow. Here are some examples:

There are more Islamophobic assaults and verbal abuse is on the rise.

As a Muslim, me and friends and family have witnessed and experienced more hostility as well as some verbal/physical attacks.

More and more incidents heard in the community of hate crime against Muslims, in the form of verbal and physical abuse. I have a friend who stopped wearing hijab when she was out alone for fear of abuse, having experienced physical abuse previously for being Muslim in the streets.

Written submissions confirm this, including these by the University of Glasgow and Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND):

In our research, we found that Islamophobia operates through verbal and physical attacks, damage to property or buildings, the distribution of literature, through demonstrations and marches, hate speech, personal attacks or intimidation and through discomforting looks, stares and glances. (University of Glasgow)

The majority of incidents involve acts of verbal abuse. This includes street harassment, including abuse in public settings and slurs such as “P*”, “terrorist”, “infidel”, “scum”, etc. The second largest form involves physical acts of aggression. Common forms include being spat on, slapped, shoved, being thrown to the ground, and women having their hijabs pulled off. This has a significant mental impact, with one victim stating that: ‘I feel so paranoid walking the streets. I feel like everyone is out to attack me. I’m super self-conscious in public now.’ (MEND)
3.2. On public transport

Participants report they are facing increased Islamophobic abuse on public transport. Consider these experiences:

I don’t know if I never noticed it before or if it’s gotten worse. I feel it has gotten worse but people shouting racist things from their cars or staring at you with disgust is something I get on a regular basis on public transport, you can tell they don’t want you to sit near them sometimes people move or even in a packed train won’t sit next to me because of my religion. I wear a headscarf so it’s easier to see that I am a Muslim.

It’s coming closer to home and I, personally, can sometimes feel the atmosphere or eyes when I go onto public transport, etc.

Every day pass you can see new issues and new way of showing hatred for example ppl don’t want to sit with you in public transportation if you look Asian or have beard ppl mostly think and comments as saying Asians smell of curry or curry munchers, etc.

This was also seen in the written submissions, such as that by the University of Glasgow:

We find that many such incidences take place on public transport, on the way to/from school or work, or outside of places of workshop. (University of Glasgow)

3.3. Attacks on mosques and religious buildings

Respondents note the increasing incidence of attacks on mosques and other buildings that are seen to be associated with Muslims:

The attacks on mosques was really surprising to see in Scotland especially in more rural places like Elgin where the Muslim community is so small.

Mosques are being attacked more frequently.

Attacks on mosques – graffiti, fire, bombs and bomb threats.

This is also observed by several organisations that sent written submissions, for example the Education Institute of Scotland (EIS) and the Muslim Council of Scotland (MCS):

Several mosques and Islamic centres in the UK have been targeted for hate attacks this year, including Elgin mosque, where vandals painted swastika symbols and comments of a deeply offensive religious and sexual nature. An April 2019 attempted break-in to the Al Baitul Mahmood Mosque in Dundee is being treated as a possible hate crime. There have been other cases in recent years where mosques have been targeted, including a petrol bomb attack on the Edinburgh central mosque in Sept 2016 (the offender had started a fire at the mosque a year earlier); and a 2013 incident during which three people desecrated the Edinburgh central mosque by draping bacon on door handles and throwing bacon strips inside the building. (EIS)

In the past few years there has been an increase in threats against mosques, attacks and vandalism in Scotland. The nature of the targeting has ranged from offensive material posted online to racist graffiti on buildings to mosque ‘invasions’ by the far right. Some Scottish mosques have also been through deliberate break-ins to cause damage and arson attacks. In the wake of the attacks this year on mosques in New Zealand, churches in Sri Lanka and synagogues in America, this must be treated as a matter of urgency. More needs to be done to ensure places of worship in Scotland are secure. This includes greater partnership working with law enforcement agencies and emergency services. The Scottish Government must also ensure funding is available for the security of places of worship in line with the rest of the UK. (MCS)

Furthermore, the submission from the University of Glasgow shows that this is manifested not only in attacks on mosques but in a resistance to the development and construction of mosques:

Resistance to mosque development – planning permission may be refused due to collective Islamophobia mobilised through petitions and lobbying, and internal Islamophobia within planning departments. There was a news article in the local paper because we’ve got the new mosque… the headline was... ‘old pub has turned to a mosque’, and you read the comments and you read what people say. That’s the kind of things you get discouraged from, that’s the kind of racism you, kind of, read. Which, I mean, it’s people’s comments you read. (University of Glasgow)
4. Gendered Islamophobia

Many participants observe the gendered nature of Islamophobia, specifically its negative and disproportionate impact on women:

I believe that Islamophobia is increasing. I never used to feel out of place walking down the street in traditional clothes or while wearing a headscarf. However, now I feel out of place, judged and unsafe while wearing these clothes or headscarf. The media portrayal of Islam has led me to feel unsafe in Scotland when I wear traditional clothes or a headscarf. People are much more hostile towards you as soon as they associate you with Islam. I’ve been confronted on the street by men and women who have shouted racial comments at me.

As a woman I have been shoved, pushed and sworn at because I wear a hijab.

Hello I’m Muslim and I’m an S6 and all this time I have been in my school there has only been Islamophobia recently this year; on two occasions someone pulled my cousin’s scarf off because she is Muslim and then later someone pulled her friend’s scarf off. I was disgusted. I couldn’t believe something like this would happen. I was appalled.

Before you could walk out alone and feel safe. But as a grown woman I now find it hard to go out alone in some places for the fear of being verbally abused.

This is consistent with earlier work that found that young women experience sexual harassment and racism in their local neighbourhood (Kidd & Jamieson, 2011) and more recent findings on the marginalisation of Muslim women in Scotland (Finlay & Hopkins, 2019).

The intersection of Islamophobia and gender is commented on in several written submissions, and indicative examples are quoted below:

Islamophobia intersects with gender. Attacks, abuse and discrimination against Muslim women and girls often focus on their identity as women and girls (e.g. via abusive references to the hijab, or attempts to remove it), not just as Muslims. This is evident in the experiences of Muslim schoolchildren in Edinburgh (see 6.2) and in a recent survey of the experiences of Muslim women in Scotland (The Scotsman, 2019). (SACC)

4.1. Having their hijab pulled off, and abuse specifically because of their hijab

Women respondents to the survey, and some men, refer to women friends and family who have a specific fear of having their hijab pulled off in public. AMINA mentions this issue in its written submission. Examples from the survey include:

Having my hijab pulled off.

I fear someone pulling my hijab off again. I hated that, felt really offended. It was in public.

Women also worry about being physically assaulted in public or abused specifically because of their hijab:

My daughter is 13 years old, would love to wear a headscarf but can’t because she takes a bus back and forth to school, she has seen me first-hand being verbally abused, even seen men tower over me as they say insults. Can you imagine how a 13-year-old would deal with that? This is what it’s becoming, children and woman being bullied into what others want because people are ignorant and uneducated. And these same people tell us we are oppressed, we are only oppressed by them!

I fear experiencing verbal and physical abuse, especially in the presence of my child, and I fear for my child’s safety when with me, as I am visibly Muslim due to my hijab.

Recommendations:

All initiatives about Islamophobia in Scotland must pay specific attention to its gendered nature.
5. Misrecognition and Islamophobia

Although not foregrounded in the survey, the written submissions show that misrecognition is leading to increased experience of Islamophobia among those who are not Muslim yet who are perceived to be Muslim.

A recent study on the experiences of Black and minority ethnic (BME) and religious minority young people in Scotland found that ‘young Sikhs, Hindus, and other south Asian young people as well as black and Caribbean young people were regularly mistaken for being Muslim’. The report stated that all of the experiences of misrecognition identified by the young people ‘were characterized by a racist reading of the phenotypical features of [the] participants—such as their skin colour, facial features, hair texture, and style—that problematically (and often incorrectly) associated them with specific countries of origin and with the Islamic faith’. (CRER)

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities is aware that a number of members of the Jewish Community have been subjected personally to anti-Muslim abuse. (Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCJC))

In response to the question, ‘To what extent do you consider Islamophobia to be an issue in Scottish society?’, we felt that that this is becoming an everyday issue for visible and orthodox Muslims and for those who are perceived to be followers of Islam due to the colour of their skin or excessive facial hair which is a characteristic of male followers. (CEMVO)

Ethnic and religious minorities experience Islamophobia – it directly affects Muslims but also other groups of people who are mistaken for being Muslim such as Sikhs, Hindus and other people of South Asian heritage. It can also affect Black African and Caribbean people. (University of Glasgow)

This is supported by research that demonstrates that those who are mistaken for Muslim often experience Islamophobia as a consequence (Hopkins et al., 2017). Those mistaken as Muslims include Sikhs, Hindus and other South Asians of another or no faith, asylum seekers and refugees (some of whom are Muslim yet some who are not), international students studying in Scotland and amongst our ruling classes I foresee becoming an everyday issue for visible and severe.

6. Fear of Islamophobia

79% of Muslim respondents are fearful of experiencing Islamophobia, and Muslim women worry slightly more about this than Muslim men. Fear of experiencing Islamophobia is found across all age groups, although those aged 30 to 50 are slightly more likely to fear experiencing Islamophobia and those over 65 are less so. Fear of crime or abuse – and therefore fear of experiencing Islamophobic abuse – is known to ‘create and reinforce exclusion from social life and from particular urban spaces’ (Pain, 2001: 902). This can happen through direct exclusion after experiencing a crime, through being cautious, through criminal justice policies and community safety discourses and through being constructed as a threat. What we found here is that the fears expressed by survey participants map very closely onto the lived experiences of Islamophobia. We now consider the main fears articulated in the inquiry.

6.1. Physical assault/violence

Respondents’ greatest fear is physical assault on themselves or family members and receiving abusive comments while in public places.

I have a fear of experiencing it more and more as time goes by due to the fact that the actions being taken are becoming worse and worse. They are extremely dangerous and could endanger one’s life, which is why the fear of experiencing it is there. There are many dangerous actions that take place, e.g. acid attack.

Group of people could attack physically.

The most common response is that respondents fear not only or primarily for their own safety but for the safety of their friends and family members, especially women and children.

Being physically abused, being targeted. My family and children being physically abused, verbally abused.

I fear for my young family. My wife and three young daughters wear headscarves, and all have experienced Islamophobia. As Islamophobia becomes more commonplace on social media and amongst our ruling classes I foresee Islamophobic attacks becoming more frequent and severe.

Many participants say that, because of the emboldening of Islamophobia and racism in Scotland, they fear not only being seriously assaulted because of their faith but killed:

I fear it getting to the point where my life would be in danger. Knife crime is on the rise and Islamophobia could be an excuse for someone to use a knife.

I fear one day the abuse will turn to physical and I only steer clear of abuse and not to aggravate it as I have a young child and I know the law is soft in this land, so I’m not risking my life.

Physical assault extends to attacks on places perceived to be Muslim, most obviously mosques:

Fear of someone hurting or throwing acid on an innocent person. Or someone doing something to or in a mosque.

6.2. Verbal abuse

Concern is also expressed frequently about experiencing verbal abuse:

My fear is that if someone were to verbally abuse me or say something that this could escalate to an argument. I find it is hard to know whether someone is speaking from racism, Islamophobia or is generally just rude.

People starting to verbally abuse me in public, or that I don’t get a fair chance in the workplace as I get older.

Some participants say that they fear being accused of being terrorists or extremists in public spaces, which amounts to verbal abuse yet is one that they choose to cite as a specific fear:

Being challenged on my beliefs and being aligned to extremist groups based on my physical appearance.

I’m afraid of people stopping me and accusing me of being a terrorist.
6.3. Social exclusion, mental health and human rights

Participants also discuss a more general fear of being excluded from public life. This is sometimes accompanied by dismay that they are being prevented by Islamophobia from contributing positively to a country of which they want to be a part.

Being excluded from general society and being unsafe in my house

It’s just an underlying lack of confidence in being accepted as being equally justified in calling myself Scottish and living here as the next person. A Polish or Romanian or any other white immigrants Scots child will be accepted as pure Scots. Muslims stick out even if they’ve been here many more generations.

Participants report how they fear that, as a consequence of the severity of the Islamophobia that they experience, they or friends and family members may see an onset or worsening of mental health problems:

Physical harm, mental trauma to my children if they are with me.

I feel scared for both me and my family. We should not be picked on because we are Muslim. When my children were small we were so scared as we were constantly being abused due to being Muslim. It caused so many problems as a family, I got depression, I even contemplating suicide due to a racist neighbour making our life hell. It still happens and I am still scared. Our life has been adversely affected by racism. I am too scared to leave the house in case of abuse. I go out due to necessity and sometimes due to the social groups at SCORE Scotland.

Numerous participants do not focus on physical abuse or verbal abuse, instead citing a fear of being increasingly restricted from practising their religion and/or having their rights curtailed:

Discrimination in opportunities on all areas of my life.

I am scared of getting stopped under Schedule 7, which targets Muslims as was reported recently by Cage. 88% of all those stopped were Muslims.

6.4. Future generations

Some participants discuss their fear for the future in relation to Islamophobia. This is not a fear of Islamophobic abuse in public for themselves, their friends or family. It is a more general fear that Muslim children and young people will grow up in a society that increasingly marks them as outsiders and increasingly abuses them.

I fear for the future generation of Muslims who are increasing in number which most people feel threatened by.

I fear for my children who are growing up in a society where they cannot celebrate their faith because they feel they might be discriminated against because of it.

Similarly, some participants discuss this in terms of fearing for the future of the Scottish nation, commenting that Scotland is regressing and becoming a more racist country.

Personally, I have no fear of it for myself, but I have two children who are both under the age of 3 and I fear for them growing up in a Scotland where there is increasing Islamophobia and them being made to feel like foreigners in their own country.

I fear for the environment my grandchildren will grow up in within Scotland. One is a toddler and the other who is less than 2 months old.

Fear that society is being turned against Muslims through an Islamophobic industry that includes politicians and the media. Fear for my children’s future.

The types of Islamophobic incidents that are reported to the police differ slightly by gender. Men are more likely to report physical assault and damage to buildings/property, while women report incidents that occur at college.

Of all those with direct experience of Islamophobia, only 22% had reported the incidents to the police, reflecting the submission by AMINA, whose survey found that just over 30% of respondents reported Islamophobic incidents. Of the 72 respondents who had reported incidents to the police, 88% identify as Muslims. Some participants comment that they did report Islamophobia but claim that the police worsened the situation or exposed them afterwards to what they felt was additional Islamophobia. Here is what one respondent reports:

Several incidents were reported serious incidents – neighbour dispute – the police took their side to be honest. I live my whole life thinking the police are supposed to protect you not come AGAINST YOU. I WAS ALSO ATTACKED BY THE POLICE, TWO CHRISTIAN OFFICERS – I was listening to music outside – someone phoned police they swore at me, ‘You black [@%$%’.. I’m not even black. I’m telling, it’s spreading like a disease, even the police is coming against us.

Several participants report that in cases where they had suffered Islamophobic abuse in the workplace or at school they informed a superior or responsible person of the abuse rather than police. In almost all cases, however, they say that their complaint was not taken seriously. They were either promised an investigation that never occurred, were told to shake hands with the perpetrator and to move on or said their complaint was dismissed:

It was reported to colleagues, who appeared sympathetic, though there was no consequence. A hate incident was also reported to a senior manager and there was an inadequate response or action taken.

I expected my complaint to be addressed through the formal party-political channels. I am still waiting a year later to be updated of the process.

It is worth noting that it was because they felt that it was dealt with in the workplace in a way that they believed was adequate that a smaller number of participants did not report to the police an incident of Islamophobic abuse:

It was resolved at work and was dealt sensitively. I did complain to the manager and he dealt with it.

At the same time, the SCJC’s written submission reveals that either a perceived or an actual lack of action by teachers and/or employers contributes directly to under-reporting of Islamophobic abuse. Furthermore, the submission by Newcastle and St Andrews Universities points to a lack of understanding and awareness among educational professionals:

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Increase awareness/training for teachers, lecturers and educational professionals about the damage that Islamophobia can do.

Participants who had reported Islamophobia to the police commented on this question, saying that no action was taken by police after they had received their report. This is explained to be why they would not be confident about reporting abuse to police in future:

Did report years ago but nothing was taken seriously. So now don’t believe the police will take the incidents seriously or pursue it. Police brush it off.

The police in Aberdeen told me that it was just a case of ‘sticks and stones’ (i.e. it wasn’t a big deal) and that there was nothing that could be done about it. I said that I wanted the incident logged by the police.

Reported it a few times but no action is taken. It was resolved at work and was dealt sensitively. I did complain to the manager and he dealt with it.

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Increase awareness/training for teachers, lecturers and educational professionals about the damage that Islamophobia can do.
7.1. Not reporting
Of the 326 cases where an incident was not reported to the police, 69% of respondents identify as Muslims. Of those who did not report it, 41% are women and 58% men. Regarding age, the responses indicate that younger respondents are the least likely to report abuse to the police.

This level of under-reporting is shown in the written evidence received from TellMAMA:

The under-reporting of hate crime is a big issue in Scotland, as in other parts of the UK. Research shows that almost two-thirds of Muslim women in Scotland have witnessed or experienced a hate incident or crime... ensuring that Muslims are aware of third-party services is of acute importance as they can, if required, report incidents and liaise with the police on the behalf of victims, or merely provide the holistic support needed. (TellMAMA)

Here we explore the reasons why most people choose not to report Islamophobia. The main points are: a lack of confidence in the police: a sense that the police are institutionally racist, a feeling that there was a lack of evidence, that the incident was too insignificant or that in this context they lacked the appropriate knowledge and understanding about what constitutes criminal activity. Some argue that the frequency of incidents had put them off reporting them, while others express concern about possible reprisals if they had reported them.

7.2. Lack of confidence in the police and the justice system
By far the most common response by participants to this question is that they have no confidence that their report of Islamophobia would be taken seriously by the police:

At the time I did not feel it would be treated seriously by the police and it was a very busy period for me so I thought I could do without the extra hassle. I personally know many other Muslims who have not reported incidents of Islamophobia because they do not have faith in the police or legal system that they as Muslims do not have the same legal protections as members of other minority communities.

It seems as though the police don't do enough to stop Islamophobia and therefore people like myself feel as though there's no point taking the matter to the police.

It didn't seem like there was any point. Police don't have the greatest reputation and almost feel as though it's not a priority for anyone.

Some extended their lack of confidence to the justice system in general, commenting that they have no reason to believe that if they were to report Islamophobia it would result in any kind of due legal process or prosecution:

No confidence in justice system.

Because it's my word against theirs and no faith in justice system anymore.

In addition, some participants refer to the length of time that it often takes to process complaints. They believe that Islamophobia is not taken seriously and would therefore not be investigated punctually, meaning that it is not worth reporting it at all:

The verbal abuse received on many occasions hasn't been reported. Firstly, due to the time it takes to report a crime and secondly as the perpetrators are long gone, nothing could be done.

in my opinion.

This is commented on by some of the written submissions, for example by MCS:

There is an unfortunate lack of confidence in the justice system, and a perception just there is not equal protection in the law, where Muslims and ethnic minorities are concerned. There are fears that reporting will not lead to any substantive justice: there will be no follow up and often a worry that the victim will be the one under treated in a suspect manner. The role of counter terrorism legislation in the further of Islamophobia cannot be forgotten. Muslims regularly face random checks and profiling in airports. (MCS)

7.3. Institutional racism and the police
One of the most prominent themes in participants’ responses to this question is the belief that the police are racist, therefore that a report to the police about Islamophobia would not be taken seriously:

Didn't think I would be listened to, as some police quite Islamophobia and racist.

Other participants comment on what they perceive as the institutional nature of racism and Islamophobia in the police, shifting the focus away from the actual interactions that Muslims have had with police to the structure and nature of the police as an organisation:

We all know what the inquiry found in the Lawrence case and what the inquiry said, which is the police are institutionally racist, so I don't trust them.

It is a waste of time and efforts because British police is a home of institutional racism.

One participant comments that they had been subjected to racial profiling and racism at an airport, and questions how, if it is reproduced by the police themselves, Islamophobia can be reported:

Islamaphobia at airport searches: when the airport immigration officers – the police – are making Islamophobic assumptions about you, questioning your humanity because of your background, how exactly are you supposed to report it and hold them accountable? The state is complicit in the spread and perpetuation of anti-Muslim racism, especially through its hostile environment and 'Prevent' strategies.

7.4. Lack of evidence, scale or knowledge
Numerous participants comment that they had not reported Islamophobic abuse because they lacked appropriate evidence. They claim that they had no witnesses or evidence to the abuse that took place and that they therefore believed it to be impossible, or too difficult, to prove. Often, this is connected to verbal abuse in the street when no one else was present. Some participants specifically express their perception that, even if the police have taken their complaint seriously, little would change:

Did not feel it will help as had no evidence...

Islamophobia is not taken seriously and would be very difficult to [prosecute] such actions.

No one spoke up for me on public transport and I had no proof either.

Several respondents articulate a sense that reporting Islamophobia is ‘not worth it’. Most prominent in these responses is that the crime was not ‘serious enough’, either because it was a verbal comment in the street that was over in a second or because verbal abuse (for example) is not as important or serious as other crimes that the police deal with:

I’ve learned from experience that the police are not interested in dealing with anything but the most ‘serious’ crimes.

They tried to pull off my scarf and walked off saying incomprehensible things. Another time some kids shouted something about pork at me in Glasgow Green. It’s usually low level and not worth reporting. I don’t know who those people are.

Others express that the abuse was ‘too subtle’ to be addressed by police. These are sometimes instances where respondents report that they had been subjected to forms of Islamophobia such as ‘funny looks’ and microaggressions, which they believe the police either would not or cannot investigate. This is also clear in the written responses, particularly the submission by the SCJ:...
Hatred and discrimination are, sadly, everyday issues for many people in Scotland. It is known that all hate crime is under-reported, in some cases because people fear they will not be believed, in others because they do not think the police will follow up reports, or because incidents have become so frequent that they feel reporting would take up too much of their time, or even because incidents are so 'routine' that some people have come to regard them as part of 'normal' life. As a result, published statistics do not accurately reflect the experience of people from minority communities in Scotland. [...] It is possible that the difference in figures may result from some people feeling more confident to report to a communal organisation than to the police, and the TellMama and Community Security Trust findings should, therefore, be regarded with the utmost seriousness. (SCJC)

Other respondents say they had not reported the abuse because they are sometimes unsure if it is necessarily a criminal offence. Some say that they do not know if verbal abuse, for example, constitutes a form of abuse that the police would investigate:

I was not sure what shall I do. There was no direct insult. An egg throwing on me while walking on street. However, it did not reach me.

No point because it's always 'just a wee joke' and the perpetrator is always sorry they upset you (never sorry that they said offensive things).

It's stranger in the street... What can police do?

7.5. Frequency of incidents and fear of reprisal

Depressingly, many participants comment that they do not report Islamophobic abuse because it happens to them too often to make it worthwhile. These participants sometimes accept the inability of the police to do anything about the frequency with which they experience Islamophobia. Some say that they do not report abuse to the police because they fear that they would be subjected to further discrimination and possibly violence:

Risk of further discrimination.

Lack of confidence and fear of losing job.

Fear of reaction from the offenders and also don’t know it will create any difference. Moreover, it will be very difficult to prove.

7.6. Reporting Islamophobia: What should change?

Respondents suggest that there should be specialist training for police officers on dealing with Islamophobia. This is discussed as a way of combating the perceived prejudice among police staff and as a way of disrupting the perceived problematic way in which they handle complaints of Islamophobia.

The fact that so many incidents of Islamophobia go unreported to the police needs to be addressed. Officers dealing with such incidents should be trained and it should be as cathartic an experience as possible. When I reported my incident, I was messed about and left feeling I was responsible, it added to the anxiety I was experiencing.

I think they need to train and educate authorities like the police, schools and the Council.

Police should be controlled and have to justify their reasons for stopping or interrogating Muslims. Police should be trained on the difference between a normal Muslim and terrorist Muslims and how to spot it. Police should not be able to hold a Muslim in station if they cannot charge him within the hour.

The written responses to the inquiry suggest specific policies. MEND recommends that the Scottish Government supports initiatives to recruit more officers from within Scotland’s diverse communities to the police. Others focus on better reporting, victim support and overcoming the barriers responsible for the widespread reluctance to report Islamophobia to the police.

Make reporting easier. (University of Glasgow)

Victim support with greater culture awareness and sensitivity. (MCS)

Respondents also discuss the legal changes that could help to tackle Islamophobia. First, some believe that tougher forms of punishment would act as a deterrent and that these are needed to combat Islamophobia. Many comment that existing legal definitions and frameworks are inadequate to protect Scottish Muslims and that tougher sentencing and fines are required and, more broadly, a ‘zero tolerance’ approach. For example:

More harsh punishments and penalties on those who are found to have committed Islamophobic crimes or hate crimes against Muslims in any form.

Not all participants see this as a means of punishing and deterring perpetrators of Islamophobia. Some believe that what must be foregrounded is rehabilitation for imprisoned perpetrators. For instance:

When found guilty there should be an educational part of the sentence. I am a great believer that people can change when they ‘walk in someone else’s shoes’. Perhaps some schemes where the perpetrator sits down with the victim.
This focus on rehabilitation, preventing reoffending and promoting restorative justice is echoed in the written submissions, for instance by SCJC:

There may also be a value in restorative justice measures but this is very much dependent upon circumstances. It may, for example, be worth considering whether conditions could be attached to penalties when appropriate, for example either to require the perpetrator to undertake work with the group against whom the offence was committed, or to bar him or her from working with groups who might be persuaded by his or her ideology. However just as one would not normally expect a rape victim to face the rapist because of concerns about reviving and exacerbating the trauma, the same is true of hate crime victims. Furthermore, it is important to avoid undermining the victim’s faith in the justice system – as well as the faith of all those who share relevant characteristics with the victim – or denying them an impression that their case has been dealt with appropriately and justice served. (SCJC)

Likewise, MCS comments:

A review of criminal punishment and consideration of more restorative measures where, rather than being dealt with purely by the criminal system, the offender needs to understand the community they are attacking so as to not increase their hatred. (MCS)

Many participants believe that the current legal status and approach to Islamophobia does not go far enough. (MCS)

It is getting worse as the problems start in parliament. Racism and Islamophobia are prominent in Parliament this this gives the right-wing confidence and legitimises their hate speech.

I feel that in general it is getting better throughout the population but the levels of extremist Islamophobic and racist abuse, both Humza Yusuf and Anas Sarwar have been at the receiving end of such abuse from elected officials serving within public office. There are also numerous documented examples of Islamophobia from Conservative party councillors and candidates.

It is getting worse as the problems start in parliament. Racism and Islamophobia are prominent in Parliament this this gives the right-wing confidence and legitimises their hate speech.

The Scottish Government should actively support initiatives to recruit more officers from within Scotland’s diverse communities, including Muslim officers, into Police Scotland.

The Scottish Government should fund awareness-raising programmes about the safe reporting of Islamophobia.

The Scottish Government should review all legislation relevant to Islamophobia and adjust this where appropriate to ensure the full inclusion of Islamophobia within this.

The Scottish Government should fund restorative justice initiatives to work with offenders.

Promote and encourage the reporting of Islamophobic incidents, with support offered to victims.

8. Factors Enabling Islamophobia

The inquiry identifies the key factors that enable Islamophobia in Scotland. One set focuses on politics, whereby Islamophobia is reinforced by Scottish politics, politicians and elections, by far-right politicians and as a result of Brexit. Another set relates to military intervention abroad and problematic counter-terrorism policies, alongside terrorist incidents, in allowing it to thrive. A third set argues that both poverty and austerity contribute.

8.1. Scottish politics, politicians and elections

Many respondents to the inquiry refer to Islamophobia being perpetuated by Scottish politics and Scottish politicians:

Scottish politicians from different parties are even guilty of blatant Islamophobic and racist abuse, both Humza Yusuf and Anas Sarwar have been at the receiving end of such abuse from elected officials serving within public office. There are also numerous documented examples of Islamophobia from Conservative party councillors and candidates.

This individual feels it is acceptable to make bigoted, racist and Islamophobic remarks in small meetings. Although complaints have been made through the correct channels, currently the issue has not been resolved, where the consensus is that I am the bad and selfish person for making this about me. This has left me feeling disenfranchised, and cynical where I now perceive politics very differently. Where opportunities were available to reprimand this individual when he behaved wrongly, others around him chose selective deafness, smug smiles, or perhaps did not have the skills to shut him down?

This case makes it clear that complaints policies and procedures are difficult to locate and time consuming to follow. Furthermore, the woman claims that ‘Policies and procedures are therefore rendered defective and ineffective’. She says that they ‘fail far short of the so-called inclusive nature of Scotland, and its political elite, further normalising the oppression of gendered Muslim voices as having no value or substance’.

In addition to being reinforced by Scottish politics and politicians, Islamophobia tends to intensify before and during election campaigns. According to the University of Glasgow’s written submission:
The period building up to and following elections can lead to increased experiences of Islamophobia. We know that the Scottish Independence Referendum led some ethnic and religious minority young people to feel insecure about their future in Scotland as some questioned whether or not they would be permitted to live in an independent Scotland. Furthermore, the Brexit vote has provided a platform for Islamophobia via social media as well as offline. (University of Glasgow)

8.2. Brexit

Brexit is one factor among many that participants discuss when explaining their increasing experience of Islamophobia in Scotland. Several participants connect Brexit with anti-Muslim British nationalism and xenophobia, manifested in intensified forms of abuse against Muslims in Scotland:

Before the Brexit vote I never thought there was an issue, I very rarely had to discuss my religion. But since I've been in numerous conversations about Islam and having to state that Muslims are not all terrorists. I've been shouted at in my place of work for being Arabic and having an Arabic name. I've been asked sexist, racist and Islamophobic questions, and if I don't answer ‘I’m too sensitive’. I’ve also lost friendships, some people who think the treatment of Muslims in America and the uk is justifiable.

Due to Brexit, new policies on immigration and Boris Johnson’s previous comments regarding Muslim women and immigrants, I do believe Islamophobia will increase.

With the intolerance of Brexit and its supporters, there is a rise in the chant of ‘foreigners go home’. This is not and never will be acceptable.

Since the Independence election, and now Brexit, people feel they have the right to openly be racist.

TellMAMA reports that:

The Brexit Party dropped a local candidate who called for mosques to be bulldozed and for the ‘cancer of Islam’ to be ‘crushed’. During the 2019 General Election, a Brexit Party candidate was condemned for referring to Islam as a ‘child rapist death cult’ (TellMAMA)

For many, Brexit is closely connected to the wider language, actions and policies of those politicians who fuel and legitimise Islamophobia. There are references to politicians in general, and specifically Nigel Farage, Donald Trump and especially Boris Johnson and the Conservative Party. Participants believe that the prominence of such figures and their anti-Muslim stance have emboldened people to be confident in being Islamophobic or, at least, less fearful of retribution:

8.3. Far-right politics

Islamophobia is also said to be increasing in Scotland because of the emboldening and growing support of far-right groups. Most participants explicitly connect the rise of the far-right to the legitimisation of far-right views in British and US politics:

With the rise of the far right it’s only getting worse, especially with the advent of far-right leaders in Europe and Trump and the behaviour of the Tory Party, some people are getting more bold to say out loud which before they kept to themselves, there is also a report out by cage which I recommend you read on Schedule 7 which is a draconian law targeting Muslims.

Since the populist far-right movements in Europe, England and USA started taking hold over the last 10 years or so, many of the victories against everyday racism and Islamophobia that had been won started to be reversed. Though Scotland has been somewhat protected against the worst of these changes, we are now at the point where bigots feel safe and confident to verbally abusing people who seem to be or are Muslims, in public and in private, with no expectation of consequence.

There was a long period where it seemed to be getting better. However, right-wing media and political organisations have carefully and more and more confidently promoted hateful ideas for the last 20 years or so, and these have led to extremists being more and more confident about openly practising abusive behaviour towards Muslims.

This is echoed especially strongly by CEMVO:

We predict that one of the main problems being created is an increase in hate crime due to current affairs profiling an uprising of right-wing politics at national and global level. This is leading to an intolerance of Islam as a religion in many cities and countries in the world. Any media and journalistic reporting of Islam/ Muslims both verbal or written is often subjective and/or part of propaganda against Islam. This intolerance will continue to increase incidents of hate crime at local/national/global level impacting those practising and non-practising Muslims who identify as followers of Islam. This will in turn damage social cohesion and further create divisions in communities locally, nationally and internationally. (CEMVO)

8.4. Military intervention and counter-terrorism policies

Entwined with comments on Brexit and the emboldening of Islamophobia by politicians are references to problematic military interventions by UK governments, alongside counter-terrorism policies that stigmatise Muslims. For example, SACC comments on the role of military intervention:
case studies, we believe this is because it the information would be damning in its indictment that Schedule 7 power is indeed Islamophobic and discriminatory; numerous testimonies by Muslim parents, aid workers, businesspeople and holiday-makers reveal the extremely intrusive and unnecessary line of questioning about faith and practice, as well as discrimination against individuals who are stopped and a lack of any due process of safeguarding. (CAGE)

8.5. Terrorist incidents

Participants claim that the increase in Islamophobia in Scotland is due to the problematic connections drawn between ordinary Muslims and those who commit extreme acts of terrorism. Muslim respondents feel that, as a result, particularly in the wake of major events such as 9/11 and other ‘terrorist’ incidents, they have been blamed and abused:

More and more people seem to equate the Islamic belief system with terrorism, which is utterly untrue. However, the more incidents of terrorism occur, the more persecuted the Islamic people in our communities are.

Whenever there is an event of sorts such as terrorist attack, the media expands the mentioning of Muslim consistently in its reporting and almost immediately on leaving home I receive abuse.

Since 9/11, opportunities increased to demonise all Muslims. This seemed the perfect excuse for bringing to the surface intolerance of all Muslims and it has not abated. It also has increased extreme nationalism.

These comments are echoed in some written evidence submissions, for example the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT):

Islamophobia has intensified in recent years. In certain quarters, an unfounded association has been made between terrorist networks, human rights violations and Muslim communities. This has inflamed racial and religious tensions in some towns and cities and may have contributed to the resurgence of extreme far-right political parties. (NASUWT)

Other written submissions emphasise how the incidence of Islamophobia has intensified and individual instances have worsened after major events, typically because of reporting in the media. For instance, the University of Glasgow’s submission notes:

The young people involved in our research did not make much reference at all to print media but did make the point that news coverage about Muslims, and in particular news coverage after specific events, often led them to experience Islamophobia at school or on the journey to/from school. (University of Glasgow)

Likewise, the EIS suggests that these have an impact on children, as well as young people:

The MWAE reported that from a survey of 100 Muslim children in Edinburgh, nearly half (46%) were worried about going to school after a highly publicised terrorist attack. One pupil said this was ‘because everyone relates Islam to bad things like terrorism and killing. (EIS)

8.6. Poverty and austerity

Some participants report that they feel that Islamophobia is increasing since Muslims are a convenient scapegoat for broader social and economic problems. They feel that by focusing on immigration, terrorism and other policies that put Muslims under the spotlight, politicians can deflect attention away from poverty and other economic inequalities:

As social discord grows, people feel alienated and with poverty comes blame... easy to blame visible and different minority.
A thorough investigation is needed to get to the root of the problem. Why Islamophobia is on the increase? What’s its links to social media, tv, poverty, education or lack of? What’s the reason and how can we eradicate it?

Several respondents comment that this first step cannot be achieved without listening attentively to Muslims’ concerns:

Investigate by interacting with Muslims and to gauge exactly what their sentiments are about school, work and business.

Development of specific policies and strategies should be informed by people with lived experience of Islamophobia.

Some believe that this should take the form of the Scottish Government leading by example and recruiting Muslims to prominent public and/or political roles and encouraging the appointment of Scottish Muslims to leading jobs and roles. This is connected to the perceived under-representation of Muslims in government and in Scottish society in general. Participants therefore note that the creation of noteworthy role models in Scottish society is a crucial step towards normalising and celebrating the position of Muslims in Scotland.

When an ethnic minority person stands for a position in politics the unions are told to vote for the white candidate – this will be denied, but I challenge anyone to do a survey. People don’t want to lose jobs. Anyone who is racist should not be allowed to hold a public post.

Do all it can to ensure its employees represent Scottish society, which includes Muslims. Ensure our educators are themselves educated about all forms of racism, sexism, etc. Politicians need to speak out more.

There should be an emphasis on representation – more Muslims on public boards.

Experts believe the Scottish Government should, generally, be providing more money as funding for community events and celebratory days of national significance:

The government should fund some sort of community integration programmes, aimed at all age groups. I think some people’s hatred derives from a fear of the unknown. Each age group has the same problems as their peers. Too often I have heard comments that are shocking and are purely from ignorance.

In a related set of responses, the revocation of ‘Prevent’ and Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act is seen as crucial by many respondents. These respondents feel that ‘Prevent’ has led to the targeting and marginalisation of Muslims in schools and that Schedule 7 unlawfully discriminates against Muslims. There are numerous comments on this:

Facilitate its reporting, ensure prosecution, get rid of ‘Prevent’ and Schedule 7 legislation, which are both based on, and encourage, institutionalised Islamophobia.

The ‘Prevent’ agenda should be scrapped and a community-level effort should be made to challenge and report extremism of all kinds. Muslims shouldn’t be singled out or given more scrutiny.

The problematic nature of ‘Prevent’ and Schedule 7 is also mentioned in the written submissions, particularly those by SACC and by Newcastle and St Andrews Universities:

The ‘Prevent’ strategy is Islamophobic and should be scrapped. In the meantime, civil society should as far as possible avoid cooperation with ‘Prevent’. Questioning at airports under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 targets Muslim communities and should be scrapped. In the meantime, its use by Police Scotland should be discontinued. (SACC)

Work to revoke the ‘Prevent’ strategy – and related forms of legislation – in order to minimise the likelihood of Islamophobia being perpetuated through its application in institutions. (Newcastle and St Andrews Universities)
9. Islamophobia and the Media

9.1. Print and broadcast media

Both print and broadcast media are perceived to worsen Islamophobia. As much as 89% of survey respondents believe that print media promote Islamophobia. Among Muslim respondents, the overall level rises to 93%. Of all respondents, 85% believe that broadcast media promote Islamophobia, and the percentage of Muslim respondents selecting this option is 89%. The gender difference is minor.

Survey respondents overwhelmingly believe that the media make Islamophobia worse. There are countless comments on this, and the consensus is that exaggerated, biased and institutionally Islamophobic practice and reporting by the media have substantially heightened Islamophobia in Scotland. The CPJ on Tackling Islamophobia is already working to address this issue by raising its profile and has developed media guidelines on reporting on Islam and Muslims (Mir & Hopkins, 2019).

Many factors are leading to suspicion and ignorance about Islam and Muslims. The media consistently reinforce stereotypes of Muslim men as aggressive, controlling and sexist and Muslim woman as passive, housebound and treated by Muslim men as inferior. There is unfair bias in the reporting of terrorist attacks, and the terminology used is sensationalised against Muslims:

Post-9/11 the media have done a great job in creating a negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the minds of many people. By demonising Islam/Muslims the media have directly contributed to the creation of Islamophobia. Prior to this, hatemongers mainly focused on colour or ethnic origin to spread their prejudice and discrimination.

Since the Sept 11th 2001 attacks in the USA, there does seem to be more anti-Muslim/Islam content. Since 7/7 attacks in UK there are more hate groups targeting Muslims/Islam, etc. To some extent this is to be expected, however the media is pouring fuel onto the fire by frequently reporting misinformation, inflammatory (and sometimes misleading) headlines, etc.

The increase in issues in the Middle East and refugees from the MENA region and foreign government policies of the Trump administration and the Chinese government’s concentration camps, the negative coverage of which portrays Muslims in a negative light, increase local incidents of Islamophobia.

These comments are emphasised in the written submissions, as well. The submissions by MCS, EIS, SCJ5, CEMVo, and Newcastle and St Andrews Universities all show the negative impact of the media on Muslims. Specific negative impacts are cited, as follows:

Less than 0.5% of journalists in the UK are Muslim yet the media coverage of Muslims is substantial. There is research which shows mainstream media reporting is contributing to increased hostility towards Muslim. These sensational headlines not only often conflate Muslims with terrorism but also criminality. An example of a shocking headline by ‘The Sun …’, ‘1 in 5 Brit Muslims’ sympathy for jihadi’ was later acknowledged as be misleading and inaccurate yet its impact is so destructive. (MCS)

There has also been increasingly hostile and anti-Muslim media coverage of particular world events such as the global refugee crisis: the ECRI has raised concerns about some British media outlets, particularly tabloid newspapers, using ‘offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology’ and says that it considers that ‘hate speech in some traditional (UK) media continues to be a serious problem’. (EIS)

A combination of print, broadcast and social media – play a key role in promoting Islamophobia. On the other hand, these are contexts where Islamophobia can be experienced and promoted but on the other, they provide contexts where it can be challenged and resisted. Young Muslims were frequently exposed to and experienced Islamophobia through media and social media platforms. Therefore, the media – in all its guises – has a clear role in perpetuating Islamophobia and Islamophobic stereotypes. (Newcastle and St Andrews Universities)

9.2. Social media

Of all respondents, 84% argue that social media increase Islamophobia, and of the Muslim respondents 87% selected this option. Similar percentages of men and women and of each age group state that social media increase Islamophobia. While not mentioned as frequently as mainstream media, participants feel that social media both fuel and enable Islamophobic abuse:

Though there has been big effort to clamp down on hate speech especially on social media, I think deep seated and misrepresented opinions are still deeply rooted in people.

I am living in the UK from the last 17 years and feel that it is getting worse in media. On social media anyone can write whatever they want, there is no check.

As in the contribution by Newcastle and St Andrews Universities, various written submissions emphasise the role that social media play in promoting and enabling Islamophobia:

Social media and related platforms – such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube – were key contexts where young people experienced Islamophobia. This included being the direct targets of Islamophobia abuse as well as reading comments or posts that were racist or Islamophobic in nature. (University of Glasgow)

We believe that all countries are interconnected, and that racism and prejudice can ripple from events overseas, such as the appalling massacre of worshipping Muslims in Christchurch. New Zealand, in March 2019, or the decision taken by Austrian MPs in May 2019 to ban the headscarf in primary schools. Events and decisions such as these can embolden racists and bigots, and in a globalised world, where information (and misinformation) spreads quickly on social networks and global news platforms, people with racist and intolerant views are more likely than ever to learn about tactics and approaches used by hate groups (or individuals) in other countries. (EIS)

TellMAMA refers to the ways in which Islamophobia is practised online, citing instances in Scotland:

Alexander Agnew, 53, is just one high-profile example of how racist emails can result in criminal convictions after targeting Labour MSP Anas Sarwar with neo-Nazi content. The Justice Secretary, Humza Yousaf, quit Twitter after daily, prolonged racist abuse and harassment on the platform last year. Both men have received violent threats online and on social media.

The boss of a cancer charity was subject to an investigation after sharing an anti-Muslim and Islamophobic Facebook post.

Twitter failed to remove a tweet from a man TellMAMA identified as in probability living in Scotland, having tweeted that the BBC was ‘normalising paedophilia and terrorism’ by normalising ‘savage’ Muslims on the radio last year. Other tweets from this user were removed, in an inconsistent approach. Furthermore, TellMAMA welcomes efforts from Police Scotland to deal with the scourge of hateful content on social media. (TellMAMA)

More recently still, the APPG on British Muslims (2021) reports that fake news stories about Muslims spreading Covid-19 are being shared on social media, exacerbating both health inequalities and Islamophobia in the process. This report mentions that, during the first wave of the pandemic, five myths were perpetuated on social media about Muslims: Muslims being super-spreaders; Muslims praying secretly in mosques and infecting everyone; Ramadan increasing the level of infection; Muslims breaking lockdown rules; and mosques remaining open. Here, social media channels are being used to promote misrepresentations of the Muslim community, thereby increasing their likelihood of experiencing Islamophobia.

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9.3. Islamophobia and the media: What should change?

Several participants call for greater regulation of ‘the media’ in general. Examples include:

The media regulatory bodies should monitor the media rather than waiting for a victim to complain the incidents of Islamophobia in print or electronic media. The service providers of social media should be obliged by law to control the channels they operate and take actions by closing the accounts and reporting to the law enforcement bodies.

Easier to report, firmer guidelines for media and social media.

Greater monitoring of social media use and also of what is reported in the mainstream media, i.e. to be balanced and not to only show brown-coloured people as terrorists. And to show all white folk as suffering from mental illness even when they have clearly been of sane mind when carrying out a horrible act on innocent people. A terrorist should not be based on the colour of somebody’s skin.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are rife with Islamophobic abuse, you only have to look at the comments sections on any story relating to Muslims or Islam. The Government should legislate to enforce social media platforms to take stricter action to police against all forms of racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Greater press regulation.

Media negativity has a huge impact on public perception and the current self-policing nature of press regulation is simply insufficient.

The written submissions echo many of these comments. Submissions by Newcastle and St Andrews Universities and by the MCS recommend improved training for journalists on how Muslims are represented in news coverage:

Increased training and awareness-raising for journalists in order to minimise the risk of perpetuating Islamophobia through media representations. Specific attention should be paid to the use of visual imagery. (Newcastle and St Andrews Universities)

There should be guidance given to the media on the use of appropriate language. (MCS)

The MCS proposes two further initiatives:

Media editors should consult with the Muslim community on certain stories where there could be factual inaccuracies on the religion of Islam.

More efforts should be put to encourage BME graduates to consider careers in journalism, with more pathways into the field.

Recommendations:

Require editors and journalists to endorse and proactively use the CPG media guidelines.

Require all journalists in Scotland to participate in regular and compulsory training on the role that the media play in fostering Islamophobia. This should include the use of visual imagery.

Require all editors to consult regularly with the Muslim community in order to promote understanding and prevent misrepresentation.

Actively promote careers in journalism to graduates within Scotland’s diverse communities.
10. Responding to Islamophobia

Of all survey respondents, 53% say that they have altered their behaviours as a result of either experiencing Islamophobia or fearing it. 92% of them are Muslim and, of the remaining 8%, more than half are from other Black or Asian families. Overall, 89% of Muslims report that, as a result of experiencing or fearing Islamophobia, they have altered their behaviour.

Most of the respondents to this question had changed their behaviour in terms of going out: staying in more; keeping children in more; and taking extra precautions when going out in public, for instance choosing not to go out after dark and avoiding public transport and certain places. These include sports facilities, parent–teacher association meetings and mother and toddler groups. When in public places, many respondents try to blend in by not wearing Islamic clothing, being especially friendly/polite and going out of their way to show that Islam is not a threat. Some remark that they have become more argumentative and more inclined to challenge the abusive behaviours that they encounter. Fewer, yet more extreme, measures include leaving their place of employment and installing security measures such as gates and CCTV.

We now consider the main responses.

10.1. Concealing Islamic identity

In response to experiences of Islamophobia or fear of experiencing Islamophobia, many participants seek to conceal aspects of their Islamic identity. In the hope that this minimises the likelihood that they fall victim to anti-Muslim hatred. Many written submissions discuss the issue of visibility:

"It was unanimously agreed that appearance is the biggest contributing factor in increasing risks of facing abuse as well as attending the mosque. (Al Masaar)"

Visibly Muslim women tend to be the main victims of Islamophobia. Men who visibly display their Muslim identity through their dress or beard and men who belong to visible minority ethnic groups are also affected by Islamophobia. Islamophobia is a gendered phenomenon. (University of Glasgow)

Scotland has high levels of racist hate crime: racially agitated crime (crime motivated by prejudice based on ethnicity, nationality, skin colour and other characteristics associated with ethnicity, for example styles of dress, headwear, etc.) remains the most commonly reported hate crime, with 3,249 charges reported in 2017/18. There were 642 religiously aggravated charges reported in 2017/18, and 18% of religiously aggravated charges in Scotland in 2017/18 were for those targeting Muslims. These figures are indicative of the scale the problem, but it should be borne in mind that many incidents are never reported. For example, Hate Crime Scotland estimates that only 20–50% of racist incidents are reported to the police. (EIS)

This issue is clearly supported by the survey responses. Participants report not wearing Islamic clothing, or dress that could be seen to be associated with the Islamic faith, in public spaces for fear of it marking them as Muslim:

I discourage my husband from wearing Islamic dress in public because he is often targeted. I don't go out as much as I used to and have become very vigilanc.

I feel unsafe to wear my religious dressing, so at times I am fearful to walk in the street wearing it. I feel as individuals know they won't be questioned and it is acceptable/natural to make remarks, they are able to get away with these comments.

Muslim women mention that they have stopped wearing a hijab because of the extent to which it makes them the target of abuse:

I used to wear a hijab, but I've taken it off as I was too anxious about going out with it on.

Not wearing hijab in certain areas and refraining from walking alone at night in certain areas.

Men say that they have shaved off their beards because in public spaces it marks them out as a Muslim:

I am now not outwardly Muslim in appearance. I do not keep a beard. I now pass myself off as a Caucasian.

Many participants report changing their posture, how they speak and their mannerisms, more generally to appear ‘less Muslim’ in everyday social interactions with others:

I've changed the way I act around non-Muslims for example the way I talk and talk about stuff. I don't tend to talk about Islam too often in front of any non-Muslims and the way I dress.

In certain situations or areas, I may not make it overtly obvious that I'm Muslim. I obviously can't change my skin colour and people may assume based on my race that I'm Muslim, but I may try to act more 'British' to avoid confrontation. I'd also refrain from wearing traditional clothes in certain settings to avoid abuse.

Some participants say that they have changed their name to sound ‘less Muslim’ on some official documents, especially job applications:

I have changed my name to a less Muslim-sounding name to help with job searches, which I found has vastly improved responses.

I had to change my name when applying for jobs.

One participant commented that they refrain from using their first language in public spaces for fear of experiencing Islamophobia if they did:

I tend to feel embarrassed speaking my own language in case that makes me sound like a terrorist or like people will think I'm saying anything bad behind their backs as I have become sensitive to others' opinions due to this Islamophobia.

10.2. Hypervigilance in everyday spaces

Alongside attempts to conceal their Muslim identity, participants frequently report a sense of hypervigilance in their negotiations of everyday spaces. This generally takes the form of ‘watching one’s back’ and involves respondents being tactical about the places that they visit, the times at which they do or do not go out, and where and how they travel. Here are examples of respondents explaining their cautious and hypervigilant approach:

More vigilant when outside, ready to record incidences on my mobile phone, watching who is near me and what cars are near me.

I have to be cautious and risk assess all the time.

Participants discuss limiting themselves to places with good lighting, walking faster in certain streets and staying away from crowds:

Just quieter, tend not to go out late at night when people are likely to be drinking. Try not to be alone at night if possible and stay in well-lit areas.

Walking faster.

Try to be less noticeable and keep quiet, mind my own business and don't speak up, make sure I'm always in a crowded place and not to take any quiet streets in case anything happens, and by watching what time I'm out till and making sure I'm not out late and limiting the amount of time I leave the house, only leaving if it's necessary.

Stay away from large groups. Don't shop at peak times.

Numerous respondents report avoiding being out alone and being careful about what areas they drive through or visit at specific times and when football matches are taking place:

I ensure that if I am out, it is always with a group. I also tend to come home earlier if I am by myself.

I wear a hijab and feel uncomfortable with people's unfriendliness so do not go out in the evenings as much and, when I do, I will always be accompanied by a friend.
We do not go out in the evening, and the weekend, there are some areas we do not drive through.

Not travel at certain times, not be open about my religion in public spaces, deleted my Facebook account. Stopped reading newspapers and listening to morning news at one point due to the Islamophobic headlines and news items causing stress and worry.

I don’t go out alone at night. I don’t take the underground if I know that a Rangers match is on that day. I avoid the city centre when there’s an Orange walk.

I avoid travelling to football games, I avoid debate with my white neighbours and friends, and I keep my political opinions to myself.

In relation to this, several people discuss small behaviour changes, such as having their phones fully charged so that they are ready to call for help or to record any Islamophobic abuse:

I do not let my family go out alone. I will always be with them, unless they are taking the car. We make sure we have our phones fully charged when going out for a walk or when we intend to use the public transport.

More vigilant when outside, ready to record incidences on my mobile phone, watching who is near me and what cars are near me.

Public transport and other forms of travel are identified as a context in which they must remain hypervigilant. This includes avoiding travelling on buses, trains or by air, or remaining hypervigilant when doing so.

I am more vigilant at train stations when travelling home. I report any racist comments made at my school to the school. I have also altered the way I look to some degree to avoid becoming a target for Islamophobia.

Yes, I was spat on one time, travelling to England. Never seen it coming, never even seen they guy who done it until I was soaked in his milkshake he spat over me. Thought at first maybe it was a bird, that’s how sly and fast he was. I now have become aware of all my surroundings, I’m suspicious of everyone, always expecting the unexpected, eyes basically on the back of my head. I’m on alert of any sudden movements, especially when I have my kids around me. No one should have to live like that or teach their kids that’s that the way they should be.

There are places I do not go on my own. It took me a long time to feel I could wear my hijab outside our home. I still worry this is a visual clue which may see me targeted.

Avoid city centre streets where it’s quiet, safer indoor shopping centre. Avoid travelling on my own on public transport.

I rarely travel by air due to stress of questioning. I do not like using public transport. Everyone looks at me like as if they’ve never seen a lady in a hijab before. It’s the norm now. with the amount of Muslim population in Scotland, but for some people the way they look at you is like as if you’re an alien from planet Mars. Like, what is this creature?

In the context of hypervigilance, two survey comments specifically promote the idea of learning self-defence and being allowed to practise it in the event that they fall victim to Islamophobia.

I am more defensive and don’t wear a headscarf. I am more vigilant on public transport. I do not like using public transport. Everyone looks at me like as if they’ve never seen a lady in a hijab before. It’s the norm now. with the amount of Muslim population in Scotland, but for some people the way they look at you is like as if you’re an alien from planet Mars. Like, what is this creature?

In the context of hypervigilance, two survey comments specifically promote the idea of learning self-defence and being allowed to practise it in the event that they fall victim to Islamophobia.

10.3. Social withdrawal

Alongside concealing their Islamic faith and being hypervigilant in public spaces, one of the most frequent responses in the survey relates to respondents either staying at home far more frequently than previously or not going out at all. This is often paired with comments about leaving the house only when necessary and being extremely fearful of doing so:

so many places, I don’t go out as much as I am so scared, especially in Wester Hailes. My children are scared to go out as well. They stay indoors. It’s affecting their health and well-being. They won’t go out anymore. I don’t like going out anymore.

Participants report that they have wholly or partially withdrawn from various public services/locations for fear of experiencing Islamophobia. For instance, some report withdrawing their children from public education in favour of home-schooling, while others talk of discrimination leading them to withdraw from, for example, social media, toddler groups, and public swimming pools:

I don’t join toddler groups. I don’t go to PTA meetings. I don’t leave the house most days. I rarely go out alone. I’m scared to go for a walk alone with my children.

I don’t go swimming because I am scared of wearing the Muslim swim costume and getting abuse.

One participant expands this to not applying for jobs for fear of experiencing discrimination in the workplace or in the hiring process:

Avoiding certain places at certain times, avoiding applying for certain jobs, avoiding certain leisure activities, avoiding accessing many public services.

10.4. Educating others

Some participants indicate that they have changed their behaviour proactively, trying to communicate to Scottish society that Islam is peaceful and that their faith is inclusive and open. This is often stimulated by their devotion to their faith and their desire to counter false representations of Islam and Islamophobia:

I have actually become openly resolved to do what I can in my small way to challenge Islamophobia.

I go out of my way to show my religion as peaceful.

Try my best to make others aware of what real Islam is and it means peace.

In contrast to those who say that they actively attempt to discuss their faith and their religion as peaceful, other respondents report that they have changed to become more defensive, argumentative and in some cases, aggressive to those who are Islamophobic. This is sometimes framed by respondents as a necessity; they believe that they have to defend their faith and their prophet against untruthful and hurtful slurs, and would often do so in the street:

I am more defensive and don’t wear a headscarf.

Well I’m ready to answer back, as I have just as much right as anyone in the UK, ‘cos my grand-father fought in the 2nd World War in UK in the early ’40s.

I would say it’s made me more willing to argue or maybe be violent towards someone, whereas before I would just brush it off.

Research has shown that some young Muslims have responded to their experience of Islamophobia by becoming more actively involved in formal politics e.g. Finlay & Hopkins, 2019, 2020. This is seen as a way of resisting their marginalisation and, in the process, educating others for the better.
Survey participants were asked about the barriers that Islamophobia creates in Scotland. We explore these barriers in relation to five domains: 1) education; 2) employment; 3) health, well-being and housing; 4) politics and participation; and 5) everyday life.

Islamophobia has an impact on the educational outcomes of Muslims (and those perceived to be Muslim) in Scotland, according to 74% of survey respondents and 77% of Muslim respondents. Only 5% of the entire Muslim cohort believe that Islamophobia has had no impact on educational outcomes. Although an analysis of the 2011 census demonstrates that Muslims in Scotland are becoming increasingly educated to degree level and higher, and more so than the population overall (Elshayyal, 2018), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) notes that ethnic minority students receive lower grades for their final degree than their white counterparts. Notably, primary and lower secondary schools are found to be places where racist comments occur and, though confident in their own resilience, some young people express a ‘perception that institutional racism penetrated a range of organisations’ (Elshayyal, 2016: 32).

Participants feel that Islamophobia creates barriers in all tiers of education, from nursery right through to university/college and adult education:

**Islamophobia will make it difficult for young Muslims to feel integrated within Scottish society.**

Muslims are already at the bottom in educational attainment and income levels so this will further hamper progression within education and employment.

Makes it difficult to settle in through uni, find a job, prove yourself as ‘one of them’.

Participants report Islamophobia in school as particularly challenging, stating that children are often excluded from everyday activities of school life such as representing their school or taking part in sports activities. As a consequence, they say that Muslim children do not have positive educational experiences and that this, inevitably, leads to poorer life chances and their possible withdrawal from engagement with education in general.

In schools, or workplaces, I think it’s more unlikely that Muslims will be chosen to represent their school or to be chosen for an important position in a job. I also think it starts making Muslims feel inferior about themselves.

It prevents the submersion of Muslims into Scottish society in general, and undoubtedly can reduce their children’s future life opportunities in our country.

Barriers to a safe and inclusive education for children and overall barriers to peaceful enjoyment of life.

Most notably, the submissions by Newcastle and St Andrews Universities, NASUWT, Al Masaar and SACC note that educational barriers are present at all tiers of the education system, from school through to college and university. The widespread nature of Islamophobic abuse and bullying is noted here, including their detrimental impact on educational outcomes:

In educational settings such as in schools, colleges and universities where everyday interactions with fellow students and with teachers and lecturers were shaped by Islamophobia or were Islamophobic in nature. Significant adults in younger people’s lives – such as teachers and lecturers – play a key role here. (Newcastle and St Andrews Universities)

It was agreed that Islamophobia has an impact on educational outcomes of Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslim) in Scotland. The basis of this opinion is that bullying, and isolation has led to a lack of attendance, performance and social anxiety. Coupled with a lack of understanding from educational professionals on how to approach the issue increases levels of anxiety amongst students and pupils. (Al Masaar)

In 2016 Samena Dean carried out a survey into experiences of Islamophobia at school amongst Muslim children in Edinburgh. SACC published her resulting booklet Islamophobia in Edinburgh Schools in 2017 (Dean, 2017). Dean found that 55% of high school respondents and 53% of primary school respondents had encountered verbal Islamophobia, 15% of high school respondents and 26% of primary school respondents had encountered physical Islamophobia. 57% of children who reported an incident to a teacher experienced a negative outcome. (SACC)

AMINA refers to ‘classroom racism’ as specific issues such as being bullied by classmates or not being treated fairly by teachers.
11.1 Increasing Islamophobia in schools

Dean’s (2017) report on Edinburgh schools (mentioned in the SACC response above) demonstrates the prevalence of Islamophobia. In the inquiry survey, schools are shown to be places where Islamophobia is experienced increasingly, both for teachers and pupils.

Especially at my current employment as a teacher. The level of ignorance is becoming unbearable. Due to the lack of knowledge and repulsive media coverage.

My son joined a new school. His P3 class fellow said he doesn’t want to play with him because he is a Muslim and he doesn’t talk to Muslims. My son said I asked him what’s wrong in being a Muslim and the fellow replied ‘We don’t talk to Muslims’.

The written submissions offer additional evidence about the intensification of Islamophobia in schools. In particular, the submission by NASUWT emphasises the increasing Islamophobia faced by teachers from diverse ethnic backgrounds in schools.

The NASUWT Big Question Survey, carried out in February and March each year, is the only annual national survey of teachers and school leaders and the issues that impact their work, the survey is a unique opportunity to highlight the changing opinions of teachers and school leaders over several years. In the 2019 Big Question Survey, 39% of BME teachers said they had been subject to discriminatory language or abuse by a pupil and 16% had been subject to discriminatory language or abuse by a parent or carer. Furthermore, 87% of BME teachers in the survey believed that the job had impacted negatively on their well-being in the last 12 months. (NASUWT)

Further evidence is offered by the EIS:

When we consulted with Muslim members in 2017/18 to inform the development of EIS advice on Challenging Anti-Muslim Prejudice, members shared distressing and traumatic experiences of prejudice. Members reported feeling marginalised and unfairly scrutinised, and experiencing or fearing discrimination, saying things like:

Every time there is an [terrorist] attack brown people get the blame. I have the fear of these attacks but also the added fear of backlash, retaliation; fears for my wee mum who wears the veil, I asked my brothers to shave off their beards. Why do I have to prove that these values are not my values? (Muslim woman, secondary school sector)

It exacerbates the feeling that I don’t belong here. (Muslim woman, primary school teacher, on taking leave to celebrate Eid and no colleagues showing recognition of its importance)

I would advise my own daughter not to wear a hijab to job interviews. (Muslim man, FE sector)

I’ve been told, Muslims don’t have the right characteristics to be a teacher, or had people say to me, you can’t possibly be a teacher even when I’m wearing my badge. It’s taken me 13 years to be just about accepted. (Muslim man, FE sector) (EIS)

The EIS writes that an increasing problem is the under-representation of Muslim role models in schools for the children.

Scotland has low and declining numbers of minority ethnic teachers (only 1.1% of primary teachers and 1.8% of secondary teachers in Scotland come from an ethnic minority background), suggesting that BME people experience barriers to entering the teaching profession, with the result that schools gain less social, cultural and linguistic capital than other more diverse workplaces. This creates an obstacle to addressing anti-Muslim prejudice, not least because there are so few Muslim educators who can act as role models, share accurate information about their faith and counter misinformation (although we would stress that the GTCS [General Teaching Council for Scotland] values and standards for teachers make it clear that all teachers have a duty to embrace equality and value and respect diversity, not solely those who are Muslim). Having a relatively mono-cultural education sector has also created difficulties which a more diverse sector might have addressed sooner, e.g., there is very variable practice in local authorities around granting teachers leave for holy days/festivals; and examination arrangements are not always as sensitive to the needs of pupils fasting for Ramadan as they could be. (EIS)

11.2 Islamophobia and education: What should change?

Educating people about Islam and Muslim beliefs and practices is regarded as fundamental to the reduction or eradication of Islamophobia by participants, and participants revealed several ways that they believe the Scottish Government could support this. Many feel that the Scottish Government should raise awareness among the population of the severely detrimental impact of Islamophobia on Muslims while highlighting the positive contributions that Muslims make to Scottish society.

I think it has to start with better education around the topic and to implement a general consensus that it’s not ok to be prejudiced against someone because of their religion, particularly Muslims; given the degree of Islamophobia. Similarly, to anti-racism campaigns, I think more needs to be done to tackle the issue, and that starts with raising it to make it clear it is actually an issue.

The Scottish Government should work to raise awareness of Islamophobia. Just as degrading anyone’s faith is wrong and unjust, so too those degrading the Islamic faith should also know it’s wrong.

The Scottish Government should start by addressing the wider issues that lead to Islamophobia. A good start would be to ask questions from a variety of Scottish sectors & people to give an overall picture. This should concentrate on why & how ideas are formed about other groups, what led to this & how the situation should or not be addressed. This could then form the basis of guidelines for government institutions, employers & other organisations. These guidelines should include ways as to spot behaviours that lead to or are of an Islamophobic nature and how to tackle them. For example, employers could have regular group employee meetings where Islamophobia is included, amongst other topics.

Specifically, schools are mentioned as key institutions in which the Scottish Government could intervene to educate children about Islam and the contributions that Muslims make, and have made, to Scotland and Scottish society. To do this, respondents suggest curriculum changes and/or the addition of content to existing curricula. Importantly, this is not always about portraying Islam positively or peacefully but about recognising Islamic contributions to science, culture and heritage. It is also about providing additional training to teachers.

Teach kids at nursery level that all are equal, humanity is what matters, colour, race, religion are all personal matters, how we treat each other is the real basis of developing close and friendly societies.

The government could ensure that Muslim scientists are recognised and taught in school, e.g. the Golden Age of Islam led to many advancements predating Europe’s rise. Muslims scientists such as Ibn Khaldun described the theory of evolution 50 approx. 400 years before Darwin in his work Al Muqaddimah, etc. A more rounded approach to history, including positive information across all cultures, should be incorporated into school, as it is important to educate children.

Educate people in school history lessons and general of the sacrifices Muslims have made for this country in the world wars. I have never heard of any history lessons about it.
12. Islamophobia and Employment

I think that RME [Religious and Moral Education] should be a requirement in all schools, with some good resources on Islam and on ‘People of the Book’... i.e. the festivals and some of the stories... and let’s all start celebrating Eid, for example, and let’s make people aware that many Muslims celebrate Christmas as there is the Islamic version of the Christmas story in the Koran.

Many of the written responses agree with these suggestions in various ways. Most prominently, Al Masaar, Colourful Heritage, MEND, the MCS, the NASLiWT, the University of Glasgow and the SCUC write of the need to embed into school curricula in appropriate ways the positive contributions that Muslims have made to Scotland and humanity:

There is a huge portion about the history and achievements of the early migrants and the British Indian Army that needs to be taught at a national level in all our schools and across the curriculum as well as broadly promoted, better across our society which we feel can be a key asset in addressing these contemporary issues faced by the BME community in particular the youth. (Colourful Heritage)

Increased and improved training for educational professionals is mentioned by several written submissions, including SACC, MCS, Newcastle and St Andrews Universities, NASiLiWT and SCUC. In addition, SACC and the EiR specify the need for a curriculum that emphasises and promotes a culture of equality and respect.

Numerous participants and submission believe that the Scottish Government should actively do much more to promote the contributions and inclusion of Muslims in Scottish civic society and the political landscape:

Muslim contribution to Scotland should be acknowledged and highlighted.

Actively promote positive representations of Muslims and their contributions to Scottish society, politics and culture. (Newcastle and St Andrews Universities)

Importantly, SACC rightly notes that many such policies can be implemented in schools without the need for Government involvement and, while schools cannot be expected to erase Islamophobia alone, they have an immediate obligation to explore policies and to improve their practice, better to protect and include Muslim pupils.

Recommendations:

The Scottish Government should fund and support initiatives that educate the people of Scotland about the damage that Islamophobia does to Scottish society.

The Scottish Government should fund and support initiatives that demonstrate the positive contributions of Scotland’s Muslim population to Scottish society, politics, culture and history.

Integrate an understanding of Islamophobia into compulsory components of the Scottish education curriculum and all teacher training education.

Provide all teachers and lecturers in Scotland regularly with compulsory training to counter Islamophobia.

Require all educational institutions to create safe spaces for discussion, prayer and reflection.

Require schools to establish dress-code policies that are sensitive to the needs of Muslims.

Encourage colleges and universities to establish links with employers with a good and/or leading record for diversity and championing ethnic diversity and anti-racist initiatives/policies.

Conduct a review of Education Scotland’s framework, ‘How Good is Our School?’,

The Scottish Government should ensure that the Public Sector Equality Duty is enforced in schools and provide additional training so that this can be better implemented and enforced.

Encourage COSLA to develop and implement appropriate programmes of race equality in the school workforce.

Improve the reporting and recording of Islamophobia in schools.

Scrutinise Education Scotland and the Race Equality Action Plan to see where improvements can be made.

Of the respondents, 86% of Muslims and 88% of participants overall state that in Scotland Islamophobia has an impact on Muslims’ [and those perceived to be Muslim] employment opportunities. Only 3% of the total Muslim cohort state that Islamophobia has no impact on employment opportunities in Scotland. Residents with a Glasgow postcode are significantly less likely to report that Islamophobia has an impact on employment opportunities (74%), and this is relatively consistent across age groups and genders. Compared with 12.3% for the overall population, 26% of Muslims are self-employed; this could indicate self-reliance or, alternatively, that the labour market is not as accepting as it should be (Elshayyal, 2016). CRER (2020) reports that the gap in employment rates between BME and white people in Scotland in 2019 was 16.4%, and for BME women it was 22% compared to 9.5% for men. The data for this inquiry were collected before the Covid-19 pandemic began, and the higher levels of self-employment among BME and Muslim communities in Scotland mean that they are likely to be suffering more from reduced income due to the pandemic (CRER, 2020).

Participants feel that Islamophobia is particularly prevalent in the workplace in Scotland and prevents them from finding and/or retaining employment. Specifically, participants feel that because of their Muslim faith they are less likely to be shortlisted for jobs or considered for promotion.

Discrimination at job interviews, in the workplace, in [the] justice system.

Barriers in the workplace – particularly Muslims wearing hijabs or burkas feel alienated and treated with suspicion. Less likely to be promoted because of stereotypes.

Islamophobia results in fewer opportunities for Muslims to gain employment. I have no statistics on this but for example there are too few nurses, teachers, childcare workers and possibly other professions, what about skilled tradespeople? Where are the Muslim painters and decorators, electricians, joiners?

Others say that they have experienced both overt discrimination and microaggressions at work:

Within the workplace, people can be more reserved around you. They may hesitate to ask questions in order to know the truth, because they may think it would come across as offensive.

More broadly, participants indicate that discriminatory workplace practices are not just bad for those who experience them but for the Scottish economy, because they push Muslims into unemployment and prevent them from making a positive economic contribution to society:

Lack of employment; feelings of the other; emotional issues; vulnerability; upset, etc.

Will create economic barriers as people affected by Islamophobia won’t receive fair opportunities to contribute or progress to or in society.

This final point, that Islamophobia remains a barrier to career progression, is reiterated in the submission by NASiLiWT:

Conference is appalled with the wealth of research showing that BME teachers and other workers with protected characteristics face greater barriers and discrimination in gaining promotion and pay progression than the generality of workers, and that both overt and covert instances of racism are a daily reality in workplaces. (NASiLiWT)

A recent Scottish Parliament (2020) report notes that in 2017 the ethnicity employment rate gap was 14.4% and by 2019 had risen to 16.4%. The employment rate for BME women was 20% lower than it is for white women and, on average, BME employees were paid 10% less than white colleagues. It was noted that 72% of BME women in the private sector and 86% in the public sector experienced racism at work (Scottish Parliament, 2020). As such, the experiences, concerns and fears here recounted by the survey participants and written submissions are clearly supported by the findings of other inquiries.
12.1. Increased Islamophobia in the workplace

Participants say that Islamophobia is increasing in the workplace:

As a Muslim, I experience Islamophobia regularly, it is assumed by many that I’m uneducated, have English as an additional language and am an immigrant. Attitudes change towards me in my workplace after terror-related incidences occur around the world. I’m almost made to feel guilty. I find regular staffroom conversations regarding immigration, terrorism, offensive and hurtful. I was born and bred in Scotland. I’ve never been to my ancestral home, yet I’m made to feel I don’t belong here.

In my workplace I have come across two episodes of Islamophobic incidents in the past year where it haven’t happened before.

The submissions by organisations that represent teachers also commented on Islamophobia in the workplace, specifically those by EIS and NASUWT.

Participants fear abuse and discrimination in the workplace due to their faith, encompassing concern about finding a job, the longevity of their current employment due to Islamophobic hiring practices of senior managers, and being abused in the workplace by colleagues or members of the public:

I fear passing Islamophobic comments that are made in the workplace.

I have a beard and my wife has a scarf. We physically look Muslim. I fear being physically attacked on the street. I fear being discriminated against whilst at work, or at a restaurant. Is fear discrimination to the point we have seriously discussed leaving the country.

TellMAMA includes written evidence of Islamophobic incidents in the context of the work environment:

The racist abuse directed towards those working in the night-time economy, such as fast-food outlets or as taxi drivers, is an issue for Muslims in Scotland also, as in one example, reported last year, a 35-year-old man entered a takeaway in Dumbarton, shouting ‘F**k you’re F**ck P**i gangsters, you think you run the show’. He was found guilty and told to pay a fine of £300 and give each member of staff £200.

A 20-year-old man named Charles Johnston was given a four-year prison sentence last year after firebombing a takeaway shop in Rosyth and then boasting about it online, reflecting far-right conspiracist language of kebabs (vis-à-vis halal meat) funding terrorism.

A man who racially abused and threatened to ‘shoot’ takeaway staff in Sauchie last year was given a community order. Francis McFarlane, 33, made comments like, ‘F**cking b**stard Syrians’, ‘F**cking Turkish Muslim b**stards’, and told them, ‘Go back to your own country’. After being detained and driven to Falkirk Police Office, he made further racist and homophobic remarks. (TellMAMA)

In a recent report about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the APPG on British Muslims (2021) reported that 81% of Muslim medical professionals say that they have experienced Islamophobia in the NHS from staff and patients, with 69% saying that it had worsened during their time at the organisation and 57% that Islamophobia had had a negative effect on their career progression. Even although Muslims represent just 5% of the British population and 15% of medical staff, of the doctors who have lost their lives during the pandemic over 50% have been Muslim.

12.2. Islamophobia and employment: What should change?

Respondents emphasise the need for employer/workplace training and the possible need for the introduction of penalties for employers who are consistently prejudiced against Muslims in their recruitment and promotion practice:

Muslim staff in all workplaces should have some way of reporting Islamophobic incidents without fear of repercussions.

Urge workplaces to train and retrain staff about equality and racism.

Increase opportunities for Muslims to get promoted and do well in their careers.

Recommendations:

Develop a workplace discrimination toolkit to aid in the identification and combating of Islamophobia in the workplace.

Include representatives from Scotland’s diverse communities – where possible – on interview panels in the workplace.

The Scottish Government should pay specific and ongoing attention to issues relating to ethnic and religious health inequalities, employment experiences and poverty.

Require the STUC to develop a comprehensive strategy to challenge Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice in Scottish workplaces.

Promote the creation and enforcement of ‘dignity at work’ policies that pay specific attention to Islamophobia.
13. Islamophobia and health, well-being and housing

Participants report that Islamophobia creates barriers to health and well-being. For some, this takes the form of access to healthcare:

Islamophobia can lead to marginalisation. The knock-on, people perhaps not going to their doctors, not taking up preventative test available on the NHS and generally not being aware of help they can get.

Some comment on restricted access to fitness activities and facilities, limiting their participation in sports. Many participants observe that Islamophobia can lead to mental health problems:

It causes social deprivation and mental instability for many. Many psychological issues also ensue from Islamophobia as well as racism, e.g. in schools in the workplace and at times of leisure – shopping, etc. Bans are set in place in many places re. the hijab for example, in other countries, we fear it won’t be long till such acts are adopted here. And this is a religious right, so essentially, it’s not allowing the freedom of religion in Scotland.

The severity of these issues is heightened by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, where higher levels of severe illness and death, greater barriers to shielding due to their types of work and a tendency to live in houses with fewer rooms than occupants result in poorer outcomes for BME people in the UK (Haque, Becares & Treloar, 2020). A UK counselling service for Muslim youth has reported a 300% rise in calls and emails since the pandemic started, with a sharp increase during Eid in May 2020 (APPG, 2021). The severity of these issues is heightened by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, where higher levels of severe illness and death, greater barriers to shielding due to their types of work and a tendency to live in houses with fewer rooms than occupants result in poorer outcomes for BME people in the UK (Haque, Becares & Treloar, 2020). A UK counselling service for Muslim youth has reported a 300% rise in calls and emails since the pandemic started, with a sharp increase during Eid in May 2020 (APPG, 2021).

Participants report that Islamophobia results in ‘difficulty in getting social housing’.

The written response from TellMAMA refers to an incident in Glasgow:

In one example, a Muslim family in the Glasgow area reported the discriminatory conduct of a male stationed at the receptionist desk of a dentistry, who, after speaking with their teenage son, mocked his name, inferring that he was the deposed Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, stating: ‘Wasn’t he hanged in Iraq?’ It left the family understandably upset and shocked. This feeling, however, was compounded minutes later when, having moved to a different area, the same man appeared muttering comments about Iraq within earshot of the family and members of staff, who did not challenge the language. (TellMAMA)

TellMAMA continues:

Discrimination can impact Muslims and other religious minorities more broadly when seeking to access medical treatment in Scotland. One study, which involved 25 Muslim and Sikh patients revealed that the direct experiences of racial and religious discrimination proved a barrier to accessing long-term or palliative care. Discrimination proved to be a barrier for Muslim women seeking access to mental health support for their children. Moreover, a wide-ranging survey of 500 individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds in Scotland last year revealed that just over one-fifth (22%) had experienced discrimination when accessing public healthcare. The levels of discrimination experienced increased when accessing public transport (35%), as one-quarter spoke of discrimination when applying for jobs, and 18% reported similar experiences when seeking promotion or equal pay. A sizeable minority of those surveyed felt that discrimination was becoming more commonplace. Trust in legal redress dropped to 60% (lower than previous years), as 89% felt discriminated against for their ethnicity, with 68% reporting anti-religious discrimination. (TellMAMA)

Among others, ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in all areas of public life in Scotland, including in the Scottish Parliament (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018). As found in recent research (e.g. Finlay et al., 2017), some participants identify Islamophobia as the reason why they do not engage with politics or could not access politics.

Fear of entering politics and the media especially.

Barriers to employment, promotion, election, political engagement, social interaction and familial bonds.

Barriers to access to jobs, access to health, access to political representations and participation, barriers to right to religion, right to live without fear especially when travelling in public transport. Barriers to community spirit and harmony. This is because Islamophobic ‘spreads’, ‘breeds’ fear.

The submission by Newcastle and St Andrews Universities reveals that, while there are certainly negative impacts of Islamophobia on political participation, these are not uniform.

With respect to political and civic participation, our research found that Islamophobia is affecting young Muslims in Scotland in contradictory ways, with some being motivated to become more politically active while others feel pushed away from participating in public life. For example, Islamophobia for many participants is a key factor that shapes their politics and works to motivate political participation. Political participation was seen as way to directly and indirectly challenge and resist Islamophobic rhetoric, Islamophobic political policies and stereotypes about Muslims. [...] However, the research found that for others, Islamophobia is a significant barrier to participation. Some participants described how Islamophobia leaves them too scared to publicly engage in politics as they think it could make them more vulnerable to racist hostility. Moreover, the scrutiny and suspicion put on young Muslims can make some anxious about appearing political and voicing their opinions. By having political opinions, by engaging in politics, there is an anxiety that the government or media may interpret it as political radicalism or potential extremism. (Newcastle and St Andrews Universities)

Researchers have observed how the stereotyping of Muslims in the press leads some Muslim women to engage in informal politics through community organisations, charity work or volunteering (Ali & Hopkins, 2012), pointing to the ways in which Islamophobia can limit their participation in formal politics. A similar finding emerged from recent work with young Muslims in Scotland (Finlay et al., 2017), where it was noted that everyday experiences of Islamophobia and racism discourage Muslim youth from participating in politics. This is compounded by negative media coverage and problematic Government policies that stigmatise Muslims. For young Muslim women, the reinforcement of gendered stereotypes, alongside experiences of Islamophobia, presents challenges to their engagement in formal politics (Finlay & Hopkins, 2019). Nonetheless, as a way of challenging the misrepresentation of their faith, some young Muslims are motivated to become more involved in formal politics (Finlay et al., 2017).

14. Politics and participation

Just over half of all the Muslim respondents to this survey think that Islamophobia has an impact on Muslims’ ability of to access Scotland’s public services and institutions. As a percentage of all Muslim participants, only 12% believe that Islamophobia has no impact on Muslims’ ability to do so. Glasgow residents were more likely to report that Islamophobia affected access (69%) than those who resided elsewhere (52%). This is an important issue. Eschvayal (2016: 32) points out: ‘the high proportion of Muslims in the younger age brackets in particular wards has implications on a number of areas, and it is important for Scotland’s public services and institutions to seek to be more accessible, inclusive and reflective of young Scottish Muslims, in among the nation’s other minorities.’

Participants report that Islamophobia affects access to political participation, these are not uniform:

The submission by Newcastle and St Andrews Universities reveals that, while there are certainly negative impacts of Islamophobia on political participation, these are not uniform.

With respect to political and civic participation, our research found that Islamophobia is affecting young Muslims in Scotland in contradictory ways, with some being motivated to become more politically active while others feel pushed away from participating in public life. For example, Islamophobia for many participants is a key factor that shapes their politics and works to motivate political participation. Political participation was seen as way to directly and indirectly challenge and resist Islamophobic rhetoric, Islamophobic political policies and stereotypes about Muslims. [...] However, the research found that for others, Islamophobia is a significant barrier to participation. Some participants described how Islamophobia leaves them too scared to publicly engage in politics as they think it could make them more vulnerable to racist hostility. Moreover, the scrutiny and suspicion put on young Muslims can make some anxious about appearing political and voicing their opinions. By having political opinions, by engaging in politics, there is an anxiety that the government or media may interpret it as political radicalism or potential extremism. (Newcastle and St Andrews Universities)

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Recommendations:

Include training to counter Islamophobia and its impact in all education for medical and health professionals.

NHS training should include material on Islamophobia and its impact on NHS doctors, nurses, staff and patients.

Among others, ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in all areas of public life in Scotland, including in the Scottish Parliament (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018). As found in recent research (e.g. Finlay et al., 2017), some participants identify Islamophobia as the reason why they do not engage with politics or could not access politics.

Fear of entering politics and the media especially.

Barriers to employment, promotion, election, political engagement, social interaction and familial bonds.

Barriers to access to jobs, access to health, access to political representations and participation, barriers to right to religion, right to live without fear especially when travelling in public transport. Barriers to community spirit and harmony. This is because Islamophobic ‘spreads’, ‘breeds’ fear.

The submission by Newcastle and St Andrews Universities reveals that, while there are certainly negative impacts of Islamophobia on political participation, these are not uniform.

With respect to political and civic participation, our research found that Islamophobia is affecting young Muslims in Scotland in contradictory ways, with some being motivated to become more politically active while others feel pushed away from participating in public life. For example, Islamophobia for many participants is a key factor that shapes their politics and works to motivate political participation. Political participation was seen as way to directly and indirectly challenge and resist Islamophobic rhetoric, Islamophobic political policies and stereotypes about Muslims. [...] However, the research found that for others, Islamophobia is a significant barrier to participation. Some participants described how Islamophobia leaves them too scared to publicly engage in politics as they think it could make them more vulnerable to racist hostility. Moreover, the scrutiny and suspicion put on young Muslims can make some anxious about appearing political and voicing their opinions. By having political opinions, by engaging in politics, there is an anxiety that the government or media may interpret it as political radicalism or potential extremism. (Newcastle and St Andrews Universities)

Researchers have observed how the stereotyping of Muslims in the press leads some Muslim women to engage in informal politics through community organisations, charity work or volunteering (Ali & Hopkins, 2012), pointing to the ways in which Islamophobia can limit their participation in formal politics. A similar finding emerged from recent work with young Muslims in Scotland (Finlay et al., 2017), where it was noted that everyday experiences of Islamophobia and racism discourage Muslim youth from participating in politics. This is compounded by negative media coverage and problematic Government policies that stigmatise Muslims. For young Muslim women, the reinforcement of gendered stereotypes, alongside experiences of Islamophobia, presents challenges to their engagement in formal politics (Finlay & Hopkins, 2019). Nonetheless, as a way of challenging the misrepresentation of their faith, some young Muslims are motivated to become more involved in formal politics (Finlay et al., 2017).

Recommendations:

The Scottish Government should promote the positive contributions of Muslim politicians and leaders so that these role models are made visible to current and future generations.

All political parties in Scotland, at all levels, should proactively adopt a ‘no tolerance’ approach to Islamophobia.
15. Everyday Life

A prominent theme in participants’ responses is how the presence of Islamophobia across Scottish society affects many aspects of everyday life. Many participants, and especially Muslim women, report that they do not feel safe outside of their home:

It creates division, it creates a ‘them and us’ that is extremely unpleasant, and it mars the reputation of Scots being welcoming. It creates an atmosphere of fear which is horrible. It puts people off choosing Scotland as their home. It is not taken seriously enough at any level so that means it continues as the perpetrators feel there is no consequence, people are emboldened to make comments or act hateful which is something there should be no home for in Scotland.

In effect, Islamophobia can be a barrier to allowing someone to fulfill their full potential.

Others state that they do not feel ‘safe’ anywhere, and that being at home is no guarantee of being shielded from Islamophobic abuse:

It affects everything. The most important thing for me is the feeling of safety and the creation of division amongst communities.

It makes it considerably harder for Muslims to access the same opportunities as others or to feel comfortable in their own homes or places of work.

Pivotal to this is the sense that all the spaces and places of everyday life – streets, shops, home, public transport, local neighbourhood – can at any time and without warning become spaces where Islamophobia occurs. Participants discuss this frequently as a persistent feeling of fear, worry and anxiety; there is a sense than potential experiences of abuse are only around the corner or slightly further up the street:

It could be general safety as anyone who identifies themselves as Muslim or its obvious from their appearance, I think would be susceptible to a hate crime. This means anyone vulnerable may fear facing violence when just walking along the street. Most of the time it may be verbal abuse and not result in violence, but it’s a bad state of affairs when that seems like the best-case scenario.

It absolutely causes barriers for the Muslim community. In the workplace, in the justice system, in education and in social engagement. It simply is a barrier to a healthy and safe existence.

For those experiencing it or who worry they might experience it, I imagine it is a barrier to feeling they can safely and comfortably exist and live their lives peacefully in their community. Feeling safe and comfortable being yourself in the place where you live should be a right of everyone in Scotland.

Participants report that Islamophobia limits them in creating and maintaining sustainable and equitable friendships. Included here are concerns about accessing social spaces, events and activities that should be part of their normal day-to-day lives:

Barriers for friendships, exclusion out of groups, etc., abuse.

It causes differences and can stop Muslims from progressing in many aspects such as careers and socially.

Not feeling as you’re a part of this country – rather feeling like an outsider which I have all my life and have accepted it, even though I was born here 44 years ago.

Related to this, participants report that Islamophobia has erected barriers to co-existence, friendship and bonding among the various communities and the integration or cohesion of Muslim communities into Scottish society. It is important to note here that most respondents see integration and friendship as desirable yet that many feel that Islamophobia is an insurmountable barrier to contributing to Scottish society – or wanting to contribute:

Islamophobia stops people integrating and prevents a sense of community, people will not feel connected if they don’t speak to their neighbours. This can lead to more isolation and resentment and causes stereotypes and views that Muslims are ‘coming here and taking jobs and houses’.

Prevents better integration of our society. We all should be accepting and tolerant of each other. Fear of Islam only leads to hatred.

Islamophobia if left untreated causes division in society. It breeds hate and distrust and it stops integration. If one side has a perception of, I don’t feel as I belong here, how can integration take place?

Al Masaar and CEMVO, too, emphasise the detrimental impact of Islamophobia on community friendship and integration:

Problems created in Scottish society due to Islamophobia are division within communities, loss of friendships/relationships (i.e. with neighbours), othering and social isolation.

It simply is a barrier to a healthy and safe existence.

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Problems created in Scottish society due to Islamophobia are division within communities, loss of friendships/relationships (i.e. with neighbours), othering and social isolation.

The main barriers caused we think is to prevent integration and social cohesion in communities and Scottish society as a whole. Islamophobia thrives on fear leading to a lack of trust and suspicion of individuals who conform to Islam and live by the Islamic code of life. This fear is fuelled by the media both social and virtual which in turn manifests in hate and intolerance thus leading to crime and violence. (CEMVO)
57.


Written submissions were received from these organisations:

- Al Masaar
- Amina – the Muslim Women’s Resource Centre
- CEMVO
- Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights
- Colourful Heritage
- Educational Institute of Scotland
- MEND
- Muslim Council of Scotland
- NASAWT
- Scotland against Criminalising Communities
- Scottish Council of Jewish Communities
- TellMAMA
- Glasgow University
- Newcastle and S1 Andrews Universities


Bibliography

For more information, please visit: https://www.civil society.org.uk/