

Listening to Muslim Women
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She Who Disputes

Muslim Women Shape the Debate



Muslim Women's Network

Women's National Commission
women's voices to government

First published November 2006



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The Muslim Women's Network was set up in 2002 by the Minister for Women, the Right Honourable Patricia Hewitt MP, and is supported by the Women's National Commission, to give independent advice to government on issues relating to Muslim women and public policy. Membership is open to women living or working in the Muslim community.

For more information, see www.thewnc.org.uk

'She Who Disputes' - Al Mujadalah Surah 58 of the holy Quran

Refers to the story of a woman who complained to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) after she was divorced by her husband in the old Arab pagan custom which freed her husband from any responsibility or duties to his wife. She disputed with the Prophet (PBUH) because no action had been taken against this form of injustice to women. Consequently, verses of this Surah were revealed to him in answer to this woman's plea abolishing this custom.

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Mandana Hendessi



Farkhanda Chaudhry



Haleh Afshar

Dear Friends,

This report challenges the stereotypes which exist about Muslim women as suppressed and unwilling to make their own choices in life. The women whose voices are recorded here spoke with passion and conviction about their desire to engage in decision-making processes both at the local and national levels and to fight for their Islamic rights. They are testament to the vibrant, diverse and committed women within the various Muslim communities, who are fighting to be seen and heard both by policy makers and within their own communities. Proud to be British, Muslim women consider themselves to be full citizens and are frustrated at being treated as outsiders.

The report calls for women's rights to be respected and promoted within the Muslim and wider community; it calls for men in positions of leadership to help champion women into leadership, as well as promoting their Islamic rights. What is required is a better understanding of Islam by society as a whole and a greater willingness on the part of Government to include Muslim women in the processes of decision making. There was also a great deal of consensus that media in general, needed to move beyond stereotypical images of Islam, many of which feed Islamophobia. The association of the whole Muslim community with terrorism is breeding resentment and anger on both sides.

Pathways to participation must be opened for women and there must be acceptance and respect for the different choices that they make in terms of life, career and specifically, dress codes, which have come to represent a key point of conflict for those women who wish to follow their faith in a particular way.

This report merely scratches the surface of issues women felt unable to talk about openly. This is reflected by the powerful unspoken words they themselves put into writing, which have been reproduced at the back of this report.

We would like to extend our appreciation and thanks to all those women who took part and without whom this report would never have happened.

Mandana Hendessi

Farkhanda Chaudhry

Haleh Afshar

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Most importantly, we would like to thank the women from the Muslim communities who took part in the listening exercises with such openness and honesty. We found enormous enthusiasm and willingness. Our participants brought good will, experience and new voices to us. They all made time to talk to us, offered a wide range of suggestions to help matters. The women did not see themselves as victims, but rather proved they are a huge asset to any community. Without their energy and support this exercise could not have happened.

Last but not least, our collective thanks to Anber Raz for authoring the report.

Summary

There is a vibrant society of Muslim women that are willing and able to participate fully in both the public and the private sector. However there are a number of barriers that the women we talked to identified and discussed and several suggestions have been offered in terms of dealing with these problems. This report encapsulates both the women's energy and positive attitudes and the fears and difficulties they encounter in terms of the public at large and within their own communities.

The women who participated in our programme came from diverse backgrounds, were of diverse ages and many focused on home based activities while others chose to participate in the public domain. The event included articulate and active women, who sought and expected to be accepted as good citizens and were determined to do their best for themselves and their communities

During the listening events we identified examples of good practice in terms of mentoring and opening the way to those women who had less experience of civil and economic participation.

However there was an awareness of the corrosive impact of Islamophobia and the need to counter it and the stereotypical representation of Muslim women.

Some of the women who talked to us wore the head cover and others did not; but they were united in their view that the Quran and its teachings are addressed directly to the believers and across their diversities. They all accepted and respected the dress code choices made by other women.

They were also very clear that their Muslim identity or what they chose to wear should not act as a barrier to progress. The report includes examples of good practice that accommodated, for example, the requirements for prayer room and appropriate washing facilities.

There was also a wish to have a stronger voice. This included playing a bigger part in setting the agenda both locally and nationally and a desire for their views to be heard by government. At the same time many women were critical of the exclusionary practices of

some local mosques and lack of access to policy making at the local level for women.

A common concern was that of violence, both in terms of: attacks in public on women recognised by their dress codes as Muslim and also in the home through all forms of violence including domestic violence, forced marriage and crimes in the name of honour. Many said they wanted to create a safe space for Muslim women and sought to access appropriate funds to do so.

In order to enable as many women as possible to participate, we also ran a series of closed focus groups for women who felt unable to discuss issues in the wider events.

The views given here do not represent the views of the Muslim Women's Network, nor of the Women's National Commission. In fact, the views enthusiastically expressed sometimes conflict with each other and with the views usually seen as 'mainstream' to the community. Muslim women are not a homogenous group; like any other part of the community, their views conflict. We have therefore highlighted those conflicts in each of the themes as a prompt to further discussion.

During the course of the events, we were aware that there could be issues which women might have felt uncomfortable talking about even when guaranteed confidentiality in the group discussions. We therefore attempted to at least identify which issues these were by inviting women to anonymously write these concerns.¹ On the inside cover pages we have reproduced the words women wrote down, when they felt unable to speak.

Finally, it is worth noting that the spaces at each event were taken very quickly. Had we more time and money, we could have run many more events. Many women travelled long distances to come to speak. They welcomed the opportunity to be heard and especially to set the agenda themselves.

¹ Please see appendix C for detailed methodology

Section 1

Enabling Muslim women's voices to be heard

Key themes:

- The women involved were extremely keen to participate fully in society and to initiate social change. They were also aware that there are still too many barriers for Muslim women to do this effectively, this included: the choice of some to wear the hijab or other forms of dress; the difficulties of negotiating access to government; and the willingness of institutions to accommodate women's voices
- The women believed that institutional racism remained a barrier to their participation
- The women said they felt a distrust of Government foreign policy – which was seen by some as pursuing an anti-Islamic agenda and as reducing women's faith in the political process.
- There was a recognition that Muslim community leaders (predominantly men) should understand women's rights under Islam, which are extensive, but are often flouted on cultural grounds
- The women expressed a shared concern about the way in which Muslim women are misrepresented in the mass media, and this was seen to exacerbate Islamophobia and racism
- A need for wider society (and particularly the media) to move beyond the stereotypes of Muslim women which fuel Islamophobia; to understand they are not a static homogenous group and to better understand Islam and its associated cultural practices
- A call for space to speak – not only in the wider society but also within their own communities
- The need for Muslim women role models to be encouraged and made more visible

"We can't pussy foot around community leaders and not address issues because of fear of getting their backs up. By not addressing controversial issues our communities are destroying themselves."

Manchester

"The Muslim community is growing – policy makers need to understand that there isn't just one way of interpreting Islam. They shouldn't go to just a few religious leaders who have a particular view. Where women are involved, and affected by an issue, policymakers need to talk to women – they must."

London

"Women at home are less empowered and I don't feel comfortable speaking for them, yes, I empathise but I want hard facts not just a talking shop. We need to consult the young, the old, a cross-section of people. We need to make a list of the issues, make a plan of what everyone wants, not just what a few individuals think everyone wants."

Birmingham

"We need to get successful Muslim women into our girls' schools to act as role models to show them what's possible."

Birmingham

"I choose to wear the hijab, I'm not forced. My dad would ideally like me to wear Western clothes to avoid all the hassle, but I choose to wear the hijab!"

London

"The media gives out the wrong impression about Muslim women – it is very rare you will ever hear of an un-oppressed Muslim woman."

London



Section 2

Violence and safety

Key themes:

- Women's lives are shaped by their daily experiences of Islamophobia and racism, which are so common as to have become unremarkable. This critically curtails the lives of women and children
- Many women did not feel safe on the streets, and are undermined, particularly those who are thought to be Muslim by their ethnicity or choice of dress
- Discussions of violence highlighted the need for service providers to recognise that violence against women is not acceptable in Islam and not to accept 'culture' as a reason for not giving all women the same protection
- Women called for safe places to discuss questions relating to all forms of violence against women including domestic and violence against them in the street. In addition they felt that at the moment they were not able to access culturally sensitive refuges and advice
- Those women with no recourse to public funds found it difficult to defend themselves against violence, exploitation and abuse
- Awareness of UK laws that protect women's rights were patchy and it was suggested that measures be taken to raise awareness. This was particularly important for those who were newly arrived in the UK
- Women who were aware of the tailored support provided by the Forced Marriage Unit called for this to be extended

"My mum wears the hijab. She's a little old lady in her sixties. She lives in a white area. Now young kids are throwing things at her – bottles and cans – every time there's something in the media about Muslim extremism."

Manchester

"Women have got abused after 9 / 11. We have contributed to this country: if we did not like it here we'd leave. We are humans before we are Muslim. Just because some people are doing terrible things, why blame the whole community?"

Birmingham

"We might be identified as middle class but on the street you're a black bitch or a "Paki" or whatever!"

Bradford

"By minimising our problems on domestic violence and forced marriage it will not disappear. It has to be addressed. Women would rather die in their silence – we need confident women; we don't need shattered, battered women."

Bradford

"When it comes to domestic violence there should be a zero tolerance policy and the Government shouldn't allow mitigating circumstances such as culture, to play a part. We've had calls from the probation service asking if domestic violence is justified in Islam because we have a man here saying it is! They shouldn't allow cultural justifications for such crimes."

Birmingham

"There aren't very many domestic violence services sensitive to Muslim women's needs. There aren't very many refuges that Muslim women would want to go to."

London



Section 3

Enabling economic participation

Key themes:

- A need for everyone to tackle stereotypes of Muslim women and the contribution they can make in the workplace so that they are able to participate fully and have the same choices as others
- A recognition that Muslim women represent a talent pool that is not being properly utilised. Women want more opportunities to make the best use of their skills and qualifications
- Women said culturally sensitive support at work was vital – prayer rooms can easily be accommodated and have been provided by many employers in Bradford and elsewhere, for example by the Halifax Building Society and many other organisations
- A desire to counter the unwillingness on the part of many employers to recognise and appreciate the considerable contributions that Muslim women could make
- Many of the working women said that as Muslims they can be confined to particular sections of the work place and were often segregated in jobs dealing with race and ethnicity; and other sectors did not see them as obvious candidates
- Younger women were already combating the negative views held about their potential at schools and in the workplaces, but recognised the need for a wider cultural change

"To your face, no-one says anything. But when people see me dressed like this – the barriers come up. If I want a job in a bank or in Parliament – I wouldn't get very far. Female Parliamentarians don't wear the hijab."

London

"My sister is not allowed to pray at work. She has to clock in and out – it's ok for someone who wants to go on a cigarette break; they don't have to clock in and out!"

Birmingham

"This perception of, 'they have to fit into our environment', is not helpful. If they are a good employer they will cater for the diverse needs of their employees as it will be conducive to happier employees and therefore more profits, which is what business is about."

Bradford



Section 4

Attitudes within society

Key themes:

- Muslim women were very clear that they should not be asked to choose between their faith and their nationality, as they felt both British and Muslim, and were comfortable with multiple identities
- Women felt that calls for integration were really demands for assimilation and that diversity should be celebrated and not suppressed
- There was a desire to influence the National Curriculum to include facts about how Islam is really practised around the world, its contribution to civilisation and learning, and the rights given to women
- Some women chose to cover fully, some with a headscarf and some not at all but they all accepted one another's choices and every woman believed that her choice of dress should be respected
- Male leaders in the community and in Muslim organisations were seen as unrepresentative and as preventing women from speaking to the media and taking leadership roles
- Women thought that a stronger level of support for multi-cultural and multi-faith communication would enhance good community relations
- Many Muslim women said that they are fully aware of their rights and would like the communities at large to accept and understand these rights
- Women felt that their rights were not routinely accepted by people and particularly men within their communities

- Many believed that their local mosques should be challenged and opened up to more women, who should be included on their governing bodies. Imams should also offer a better understanding of Muslim women's rights and entitlements

"Some of us are born here – we consider ourselves British!"

Birmingham

"The Muslim community is quite different across different towns and cities in the UK – in Birmingham, Manchester, Leicester – you see a real contrast in how Islam is practised."

Manchester

"I have a problem with the word 'integrated'. To me that means becoming like the host community. It's about learning from each other."

Manchester

"If young people are constantly battling negative perceptions about them is that not going to erode their self-confidence?"

Bradford

"Unless we learn to communicate with each other we will never understand each other."

Bradford

"I was told by my history teacher that I'd be barefoot and pregnant by the time I was 16 so I could relax and have a good time in these classes! Consistently throughout my education I've always come across these barriers. In terms of young Muslim women this has to be tackled, the careers advice they get is crap!"

Manchester



Section 4

Attitudes within society *continued*

"The National Curriculum does not allow for diversity or demographics."

Manchester

"As a Board of Governors, we challenged the teachers' low aspirations for our children. We sacked the old racist Head and we got an excellent new Head. Together we have turned it round and it is now the top school in the country, in terms of benefit – but it is still teaching the same Pakistani kids!"

Birmingham

"Men in all societies may control women, however they don't use religion as a justification, the way it is wrongly used by Muslim men within the community."

Manchester

"Women's rights are well advanced in many Islamic countries. We need to publicise that. Muslim countries are not third world countries!"

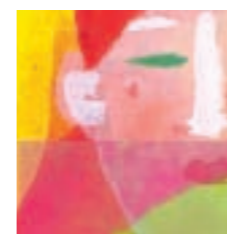
Manchester

"We need more women scholars of Islam."

London

"There was no access for women to our local mosque. We started a petition and got 150 women to sign it and that got us access."

Birmingham



Section 5

Encouraging civic participation

Key themes:

- A huge willingness on the part of Muslim women to participate fully. But women felt constrained by their experiences of Islamophobia, by restrictions placed on them through prejudice, and because of their choice of dress
- Women want to be consulted about public services to ensure they meet their needs – the new legal Duty on Gender Equality will help here
- Language barriers and unfamiliarity with the ways that committees and other civic bodies functioned were identified as problems. There were examples of good practice in Birmingham, where Muslim women were accompanied by intermediaries to such meetings in order to 'pave their way'
- Language barriers were problematic in the health sector where women did not find suitable interpreters. Their own children or interpreters from their own communities were not always the best people to accompany them in their visits to clinics and hospitals. Female interpreters from outside the immediate community are needed
- Women did not trust professionals from within their own communities to be always bound by professional rules of confidentiality
- There is a lack of easily accessible funding for organisations serving Muslim women. More seed funding needs to be allocated to help establish path-breaking groups
- A need for specific help, such as mentoring, targeted at Muslim women who feel unable to take positions such as magistrates and school governors. These are stepping stones towards wider participation at regional and national level

"We need a forum where all can express their views, we need to find places where it's comfortable to go. Everyone has a view when they feel comfortable."

Birmingham

"There's a lack of funding for women's organisations, especially around networking the community. From my own experience, there's so much bureaucracy to go through to get funds – more funding, and more accessible funding, would help."

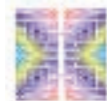
Manchester

"When I was younger – I grew up in Essex, a mixed community – there were only a few GPs the young women would go to – because GPs in the community felt able to pass information about your sexuality to their parents."

London

"Service providers need to be faith-sensitive. We've all got different cultures, but the religion is what brings us all together. Muslim women are afraid to access services."

Manchester



VOICES



Section 1

ENABLING MUSLIM WOMEN'S VOICES TO BE HEARD

1.1 Voice

Women expressed their desire to speak out about issues, but felt there were almost no opportunities to do so. They were angry that when the Government did talk to the community, only men were invited. They felt strongly that any limited engagement the Government has with Muslim communities is always directed at so-called community leaders (invariably men), who are expected to represent the views of women but do not do so. Women heavily criticised organisations claiming to represent the views of the various Muslim communities and argued that women's voices were either absent or extremely marginalised within those organisations.

Many women said how pleased they were to be at the Listening to Muslim Women events, but emphasised that these should not be 'one off' events and that the dialogue between policy makers and Muslim communities must be ongoing. Many felt strongly that Muslim women role models should be encouraged and made more visible.

Questions were also raised about the benefits of engaging with Government, as even when they were consulted, people could not see any results. However, there was strong and clear recognition of the Muslim communities' responsibility to engage.

Women wanted a voice within their communities and a space to speak in openly. Many wanted women-only spaces not only within the mainstream, but also within their own communities; others wanted to see all mosques opened up to women. Whatever the solution offered, everyone agreed that women ARE currently excluded from debate on community issues and that this must stop. They pointed out that often the leaders of the community (men) would ignore women's needs completely.

Women emphasised the fact that the many rights accorded to them in Islam were being withheld from them by men within the communities who would use

Islam as a way to control women; they said that this was clearly driven by cultural mores, rather than Islamic values and beliefs. Women from many different Muslim countries – Pakistan, Iran, Somalia, Iraq, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Turkey and so on. This highlighted the many interpretations of Islam and what it says about women's rights is suppressed in some countries but not in others. There was a desire to look at ways in which this could be more widely understood.

Engaging with Government

"We can't pussy foot around community leaders and not address issues because of fear of getting their backs up. By not addressing controversial issues our communities are destroying themselves."

Manchester

"Government needs to hear from the grassroots. The 'leaders' in the community – MPs, Councillors – have made themselves 'white' – they are puppets. They have detached themselves from the community. If you continue to get your ideas from these people, your policies will continue to fail!"

Manchester

"You get policy makers talking to faith groups. They only come as far as the Muslim male leaders and say "Oh you can sort out the voices of your women, we'll just deal with you!"

Manchester

"Government only listens to community leaders and few women are ever involved!"

Birmingham

"The Government must build bridges with faith communities"

Manchester

"I know a lot of women who could have come along today, but they see this as Government 'ticking a box'. They think it's not worth talking to Government."

Manchester

"If you want to reach Muslim women, you have to do it face to face. Email doesn't work!"

Manchester

"If you want to engage with women, you need to look at what their motivations are."

Manchester

"Where do we take what is happening here today – to men! How much interception will it have from women along the way? Men make policies."

Manchester

"The level of respect for community leaders and what they say is not there any more. It's changing, so how can those leaders who don't know what is happening on the grassroots level, know what our issues are?"

Manchester

"The Government need to take an active role in looking at the whole picture when they talk about communities they are demonising."

Manchester

"There is a danger of thinking that the Government doesn't do anything. We are lucky to live in a country like this. If you look at our neighbouring countries such as France I thank my lucky stars that I live in this country."

Manchester

"I do believe the glass is half full not empty, but people have fought for their rights."

Manchester

"We are very lucky, we have an NHS system, legal system and things like that, but we are programmed to think, like my parents when they came here, that the world is doing them a favour. They have forgotten how much they had to struggle and if we start getting into the same mindset that would be dangerous."

Manchester

"Schools don't talk to each other, government don't talk to each other. There's good practice out there but it's not being communicated."

Manchester

"People in high positions just want to engage with people they feel less threatened by or most threatened by!"

Manchester

"We should be consulted by the Government on the role of mosques and any changes which are on the agenda."

London

"I'm not even aware of these planned changes for mosques and that upset me. We [women] should be consulted too; it affects my family, my children."

London

"The Government needs to do more advertising about events like this."

London

"Students should be involved and consulted more. They know more about what's actually happening!"

London

"We have to also take responsibility and ask for changes!"

London

"We give our views and opinions to Government and get nothing back – we don't know what's happened. There needs to be some accountability."

London

"I'm from India and came here 34 years ago as a new graduate. I persevered with everything I had to do. Our local MP is a very right wing Tory MP – it's not easy. I'm persevering: if not, they would have put us in the bin a long time ago!"

Leicester

"It's the Government's responsibility and ours to be more transparent and have consultation in a real way, not just you consult and then disappear, and nothing is heard."

Leicester

"If the consultative groups come up with difficult answers, the government shouldn't shy away. We might ask for things that men might not like, but the government should listen to us!"

Leicester

"Government speaks to the same old women over and over again and nothing gets done!"

London

"The Muslim community is growing – policy makers need to understand that there isn't just one way of interpreting Islam. They shouldn't go to just a few religious leaders who have a particular view. Where women are involved, and affected by an issue, policymakers need to talk to women – they must."

London



"It doesn't serve the Government's purpose to find moderate Muslims."

Birmingham

"The Government needs to consult more effectively with Muslim women. Why aren't there more meetings like this?"

Birmingham

"We need a government minister to support this work more regionally."

Birmingham

"I went to a Home Office road show, there were only two tables of women and all the rest were men."

Birmingham

"The Government departments in London, how are they reaching out?"

Birmingham

"When the Government consults, they only consult men, where are the women?"

Birmingham

"We need to take responsibility and find out what's going on ourselves, not just wait for others to come to us and find us, we should use word of mouth."

Birmingham

"We've had a number of consultation exercises in Bradford since the race riots, but who is maintaining the results and what is actually changing on the ground for people?"

Bradford

"We shouldn't be passive receivers of Government policy we should be active!"

Bradford

"We need participation on a national level. For us to sit in the UK and not have avenues to be able to lobby the Government is just poor!"

Bradford

Exclusion of Muslim Women

"Men across the board are in more decision making positions. Women from other communities can find ways of getting heard, Muslim women can't."

Manchester

"When you meet with a white professional, he will talk to the white woman first and Muslim or Asian women last. They think we are stupid!"

Birmingham

"There aren't enough Muslim women in high positions in society. Government tends to go to already established organisations which are run by men and then they say they represent women as well – they don't!"

London

"What have MCB [Muslim Council of Great Britain] done for us? Nothing – they're all men!"

London

"I went to the Mayor of London's Eid event a couple of years ago. It was supposed to be for families yet the majority there were men. Where were the women?"

London

"Muslim women can't speak up and if they want to they get in trouble."

Leicester

"Something like this [the event] is very unusual – actually listening to Muslim women, that's why we are here, this just doesn't normally happen, it's great!"

Manchester

Representing Muslim women

"Government officials don't look into whether the people who claim to be representing us are actually doing something for the community."

Birmingham

"Whenever there is a problem the Government always turn to the usual 'leaders' the Imams. But are they really our leaders?"

Birmingham

"The Muslim Council of Britain is mainly male. We (women) don't have a voice in it. But they are used to speak for the community!"

London

"There have been major problems since 9/11 with the cartoons etc who do you contact for a reaction? Muslim Council, are there any women within that? Birmingham has 50 different mosques, how do they get together?"

Birmingham

"The Government is failing community organisations by not monitoring where funding is going, how it's being used and who it represents."

Birmingham

"No-one else has a right to speak on our behalf for us. If there are issues concerning us – we must be consulted."

London

"We need women to speak up, who are these people speaking for us? Space needs to be filled by women."

Birmingham

"Don't talk about them [women] without them [women]."

Birmingham

"We need to get the views of Muslim women who feel oppressed as well as the views of Muslim women who have rejected their religion or women who have rebelled and may be alienated."

Birmingham

"We also need to involve Muslim sisters not wearing a scarf."

Birmingham

"Women at home are less empowered and I don't feel comfortable speaking for them, yes, I empathise but I want hard facts not just a talking shop. We need to consult the young, the old, a cross-section of people. We need to make a list of the issues, make a plan of what everyone wants, not just what a few individuals think everyone wants."

Birmingham

"There needs to be less focus on problems and more constructive discussions. We're always covering the same ground."

Birmingham

"We need good leaders now to act as role models."

Birmingham

Participation in public life

"I wasn't aware that these sort of things go on [Listening to Muslim Women Events] and do think it's important to have women's networks and opportunities for women to meet."

Leicester

"There needs to be more awareness and publicising of events, even people working with women's organisations don't find out about events, let alone women at home."

Birmingham

"If I, who work with women, didn't know about today, what about those women at home? They should be targeted, their views are new, and professional women are already getting around."

Birmingham

"Break the stereotypes! If a woman is at home raising a family she should still have a say and be targeted. Muslim women and families need awareness. My mum didn't know about today's event, her friends don't; you really need to advertise for women at home."

Birmingham

"People don't attend events for lots of reasons. People worry about joining some groups, what's the group's background? What kind of Muslims are part of the group, what's the group's agenda?"

Birmingham

"Facilities are available but the problem is accessing them, that's the problem. It needs women to step into the public sphere; as we've organised things, and then women don't turn up. We need to take the space."

Birmingham



"It's amazing to be here, I've never been to anything like this before. Me, at my age, this is my first time with professional women."

Birmingham

"I'm glad today was open access. It's so good it's not limited to organisations, otherwise I wouldn't be here."

Birmingham

"I started with the Muslim Women's Network a year and a half ago, which I think is a wonderful opportunity for us as women."

Leicester

"We have too few of these events which are led by Muslim women. Bradford is a great city but something that challenges me is, why hasn't our community developed the way other communities have? I think it comes down to the leadership."

Bradford

"What role models do we have in terms of Muslim women? That should perhaps be the role of the Muslim Women's Network, to show us who our Muslim role models were and are. As a child I was never presented with a Muslim woman role model in school. There are everyday role models of Muslim women, but they need to be made visible."

Manchester

"There's a need to empower women to get involved and draw on their skills."

Birmingham

"We need to engage with younger girls. I took year 11 girls on a eight-week workshop, they didn't have a clue! Though growing up here, they didn't have any aims and aspirations. That's why role models are especially crucial for young girls. I could use all of you as role models, so don't become apathetic and disillusioned. Reach the girls at 13, they're enthusiastic so they will stay committed."

Birmingham

"We need to get successful Muslim women into our girls' schools to act as role models to show them what's possible."

Birmingham

"We've got six 15 year olds standing in the Youth Parliament, we've never even had one before, they would be good role models. We should use our local people as positive role models."

Birmingham

"As individuals we have a responsibility to show positive role models."

Birmingham

"We can have local women as role models, for example, I know a local doctor who's also a mother. She's very humble."

Birmingham

"We shouldn't have the same people every time. We should break out of the usual circles; the Government needs to take responsibility for this as well."

Birmingham

"Younger girls need role models and a knowledge of the opportunities and potential that are available."

Birmingham

"There is racial discrimination against Muslims. There is no Muslim member of the Board in my organisation. Our centre is closed for all other religious holidays, but not for Muslim holidays. If the Government is giving grants they must give them only to organisations that do not discriminate against people like this. There should be more women in public appointments and around the policymaking table."

Birmingham

"We need Local Authority staff to reflect the community – and central government and Parliament too."

Birmingham

"We need a body that is able to tell people this is going on or that debate is happening etc and please give your views, or write in to protest, etc."

Bradford

"There is a Persian saying that 'one hand doesn't have any voice' – together we can have a bigger impact and we must all come together."

Bradford

YOUNG WOMEN

"Children need youth centres, in a Muslim setting – for me, an older Muslim girl would be a good person to get advice from."

London

"Younger girls need role models and a knowledge of the opportunities and potential that are available."

Birmingham

1.2 Perceptions and Stereotypes

Women spoke extensively about the stereotypes of Muslim women they feel exist within society generally and in employment. Many felt the true rights accorded to women in Islam are not known by people at large and that most of the stereotypes which exist, are heavily influenced by inaccurate media portrayals of Muslim women as oppressed and submissive. Muslims are not a static homogenous group; the great diversity that exists amongst Muslim communities is often not portrayed. Cultural and faith stereotypes are propagated by the media who collude with a restricted number of organisations to give a platform only to a limited range of ideas. This has a particularly detrimental effect on women, who are thus rendered invisible. Women called for more opportunities to help non-Muslims to learn about the realities of Muslim life. The hijab was seen to be particularly surrounded by stereotypes; many women were frustrated at having to justify wearing it. It was felt that Muslim women are portrayed as being unable to make decisions and being forced to wear the hijab or to get married, for example, when in fact many take these decisions themselves, sometimes against the will of their family.



Stereotypes about Muslim women

"Non-Muslims make assumptions about us – assumptions that Muslim women are not listened to within their home and community."

Manchester

"We need to break the stereotypical view of women living at home having no opinions or a voice."

Birmingham

"Muslim women are not all the same. The role of women in the family, the community and workplace will vary as well."

Bradford

"In Uni I'm in a class of 200. When I say to my friends, who are educated, that I want to do a Master's, they say, aren't you supposed to stay at home? There's a need to raise awareness."

London

"I have a strong personality and have been able to instil that in my children who all have special needs. Their father doesn't have as strong a personality as me – God help them if their father had the responsibility of bringing them up! Bringing up children doesn't mean you have to give up on a career."

Bradford

"We went out with some work colleagues, we were just being ourselves and having a laugh, they were shocked and said 'oh my God, you don't need alcohol!' We can have a laugh – they think we don't know how to have fun just because we don't drink!"

Birmingham

"Not all arranged marriages are forced!"

London

"Islam condemns forced marriages – according to Islam a husband and wife should see each other before they're married – you don't want to live your life with someone you're not sexually attracted to!"

London



"Muslim women who are not abused by husbands are articulate and not oppressed and not playing the victim role, face triple barriers."

Birmingham

"The first thing people see is my scarf."

London

"There is the assumption that women are forced into wearing a hijab – we are not seen as able to make choices."

Manchester

"I choose to wear the hijab, I'm not forced. My dad would ideally like me to wear Western clothes to avoid all the hassle, but I choose to wear the hijab!"

London

"People tell me that I'm oppressed by men into covering my hair. – but it's my choice to do so."

Manchester

"Some men treat you like you're stupid because you're wearing a hijab – they think we're illiterate."

London

"I just started wearing the hijab recently and the same people who I was in meetings with before look at me and speak to me like I'm stupid all of a sudden. I'm still the same person!"

Birmingham

"When I'm on a bus and people hear me talking on a mobile phone – they look at you in shock because I have a London accent and I'm a hijabi!"

London

"Some Muslim women do cover their faces and that can be shocking for some people. Although we think they are ignorant, they may think we are too. We, as educated Muslim women need to speak up."

London

"It's easy to pinpoint a Muslim woman; as soon as they see a scarf on your head, that's it. That's how we're separated from other faiths. I don't know why it's a problem, it's only a piece of cloth!"

London

"Feminists are usually seen to be anti-Muslim and disagree with the hijab."

Birmingham

"We can be feminine and feminist."

Birmingham

YOUNG WOMEN

"In Islam, a woman and man are allowed to see each other before an arranged marriage – and to see if they are attracted to each other. Imagine waking up next to an ugly man every morning!"

London

"I'm from a diverse family, I was a rebel but then embraced Islam after university. People are constantly judging me, both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. I moved from London to Birmingham and thought it would be better, but it's actually worse – it's very ghettoised in Birmingham. Colleagues have pre-conceived ideas about me; they automatically assume I have a dad or husband beating me!"

Birmingham

"I got engaged – was really lucky, it was a good engagement. I knew him for four years before and we got engaged last April (Islamically married but British engaged). He is 24 and I'm 17 (7 years between us) and people always ask if it was a forced marriage? Did you know him before? My mum wasn't keen on the idea; she thinks I'm too young, but my dad was supportive of my decision to get engaged. I thought the idea of getting engaged young was good, as you get a chance to get to know your prospective husband. At the end of the day, it was my decision: I wasn't forced, our families all get on, and right now I'm looking for wedding dresses!"

London

"Had a pin-on badge of my favourite band Jam, you know the English band from the 80's. An English man asked me one day, 'why are you wearing that – you're a Muslim?' – why can't I be a Muslim and still be interested in music and fashion?"

Birmingham

"When you are wearing a hijab people automatically think that you cannot actively participate in society. Restrictions are automatically imposed about what you can and can't do."

Birmingham

"I am more confident of wearing the hijab now than I was before. I am even thinking of going horse riding which I would have never done before!"

Birmingham

Media Portrayals

"Why do the media always put a nutter on TV to speak for the Muslim community?"

Birmingham

"Media play a big part on how we are represented. The negative is always highlighted. When Islam is mentioned and women are mentioned, it's always about oppression."

Manchester

"The media gives out the wrong impression about Muslim women – it is very rare you will ever hear of an un-oppressed Muslim woman."

London

"The media is responsible for the negative views about Islam – it's always attacking and stereotyping Islam, giving the impression that Muslim women are oppressed, suppressed and depressed!"

London

"The media portray us as little mice. But Muslim women are not mice. We are portrayed as having been forced by some man to wear the hijab."

London

"There was one occasion when a dumb English girl asked me how come Muslim men beat their wives – where would she get that idea? Isn't it the media!"

London

"The reason women don't have a say, is because they've got used to being told what to do. Some men can take advantage of that. The media can play a big part – in a programme you'll get a Muslim guy with a big beard – where are the women? There are lots of professional women here today – doctors, pharmacists, academics – but they are never invited on TV!"

London

"When the media say we're oppressed, we start getting paranoid and believing it ourselves."

London

"Even the portrayal of Muslim culture is done badly. Look at that programme on Channel 4 called Yasmin. That was from a Pakistani/Asian culture. What about Arabic and African Muslims? They are not portrayed at all. Even when trying to depict an aspect of Muslim life they get it wrong. Their idea of a Muslim wedding is always from an Asian perspective depicting Asian culture which is not a total reflection of Islam."

London

"We need more Muslim women role models especially on soaps."

Birmingham

"Sharia TV was really good. They had lots of debates among scholars, they talked about everything – female football players, abortion, – it was great! But why is all the good stuff on after midnight? And all the bad images of Islam are on prime time TV!"

Manchester

"Any programmes about Muslims are on after midnight – maybe after Eastenders would be good!"

London

"The media don't understand the differences within the Muslim community – and we are told there's only one way to practice Islam."

Manchester

"Media don't bring out the good aspects of the Muslim community."

Bradford

"If there's one bad person who's Muslim, it's all over the media. We are people too; there are bad people amongst all groups."

London

"When news is reported it's always the 'Muslim terrorist' you never hear them say things like the 'English/ white paedophile!'"

London

"In the media, fine you have to print a name, but take Muslim out, why is it necessary to do that?"

London



"There is sensationalisation of all the issues in the media."

Birmingham

"Only extremist views are being splashed all over the media."

London

"How can we mainstream moderate Muslims on to the TV?"

Birmingham

"Loudest voices are always picked up by the media, where do we fit in?"

Birmingham

"We can't promote work we're doing without them [the media]. There are lots of negative voices shouting so we need to be louder."

Birmingham

"The guy who was dressed as a terrorist at the rally last week – turns out he's a drug dealer – the headlines said that he was dealing drugs to fund Muslim causes! The fact that drugs and dealing in drugs is totally contrary to the principles of Islam is completely ignored!"

(Referring to protest in London against cartoons in the press in February 2006)

Birmingham

"Have you heard these new words they're using in the media like Jihadists and Mohammadists – what is that? I've never heard of these words!"

In response: "They'll be in the dictionary before long!"

Birmingham

"When they were talking about Turkey joining the EU, it was portrayed in the media as dangerous – because of its large Muslim population. But Turkey is actually very westernised."

Manchester

"How many people have converted to Islam since 9/11 and 7/7? It is the fastest growing religion at the moment, so it couldn't be as bad as the media makes it out to be, and converts are the strictest Muslims."

London



YOUNG WOMEN

"Channel 4 is the most Muslim-friendly TV channel in Britain – but even they give a stereotypical view of arranged marriage."

London

"We are part of the Islamic College in Willesden – the biggest issue is the media – they say we are extreme – one of the girls in our class says – 'yes we are extreme – extremely polite, extremely kind!'"

London

"I'm fed up of watching the news and hearing about terrorist this and terrorist that. They always seem to interview the Muslim nutter and never aim to seek the views of the average law abiding Muslim man/ woman!"

Birmingham

"How do the media want to portray the Muslim faith? From what I can see it's always in a negative way!"

Birmingham

1.3 International

There was a strong sense that UK foreign policy was anti-Muslim and there was much discomfort with the UK's alliance with the U.S. which, many believed were carrying out policies and practices contrary to human rights. Many of the women felt that by taking part in wars against Muslim countries, the UK was following an anti-Islamic agenda, which they found disappointing and incomprehensible. The UK's tolerance of Guantanamo Bay was seen as a key example of a policy, which was clearly contrary to international human rights treaties and conventions. They believed this would not have been the case had the prisoners of Guantanamo been non-Muslims. Women complained about what they saw as double standards in the treatment of Palestinians by the State of Israel and the UK's foreign policy and ally, the U.S.

"Government says it's opposed to bullying in schools, but they walked into Iraq and started pushing people around. You're told to stand up to a bully. But you see people in Palestine standing up for themselves, and they get shot. You can't say violence is the answer – but who's the good guy there?"

London

"A few years ago, I heard the Government stopped the press from reporting opposition to the Iraq war. Many young people think the press is completely controlled by the Government."

London

Farkhanda Chaudhry MBE - First Scottish Muslim Woman Magistrate

One of the purposes of enlisting lay judges within the judicial system is to ensure that the experience from our diverse society is utilised. Therefore my motivation behind the aspiration to become a magistrate encompassed this understanding. When I first became a magistrate I felt daunted by some aspects of the position, especially sitting on the bench and conducting trials. However, as I have built up my experience over the last 10 years I feel much more confident. I have found it to be a challenging and rewarding role. I thought as a Muslim woman magistrate I would open doors for other women from BME backgrounds by presenting a role model and also making Muslim women visible.

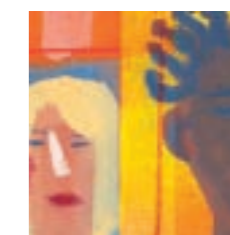
Rehanah Sadiq - Muslim Woman chaplain

Muslim Chaplain, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Trust and Birmingham Women's Hospital NHS Trust. Over the years, her voluntary and extensive experience has brought her into close contact with Muslim communities, especially in the area of women, families and youth. She was involved in spearheading young women in an active youth movement, Young Muslims UK, in the 1980's. She is now an active member of the Islamic Society of Britain both on a national as well as a local level.

She maintains an active role in public speaking on Islamic topics in universities and other educational institutes as well as various seminars and conferences. Rehanah is a founding member of Reflection Network, a national training organisation committed to this purpose.

Asian Women of Achievement Awards

Set up in 1999, to celebrate the achievement of Asian women in the UK and provide inspiration and role models for the next generation – the awards have grown to become a powerful voice for Asian women. The Patron Cherie Booth attends each year with a variety of other guests – HRH Prince Charles, The Duchess of Cornwall, HRH The Duke of Kent and Her Highness the Begum Aga Khan have been some of the people who have supported the Awards. They have brought into the public forum many unsung heroines from all parts of the UK. Yasmin Jetha who was the only Asian women of the Board of a FTSE 100 company (Abbey National), Busra Nasir who is an educationist par excellence, Shazia Mirza a stand up Muslim commidienne, Fareena Alam of Q news and many others including Parm Sandhu an officer with the Metropolitan Police. The awards are universally acknowledged as showcasing Asian talent and are supported by major corporates including Lloyds TSB, BP, Shell, BBC Asia Network, Jaguar, KMC and Deutsche Bank among others. 750 people attend the annual dinner together with sponsors and the preminent panel of judges.



Section 2

VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

2.1 Safety

Safety was the biggest issue women raised and it generated long discussions. The majority of people had personal experiences to recount ranging from harassment and verbal abuse to serious threats and assaults stemming from the fact that they were Muslim. Women in the hijab felt particularly vulnerable to attack following both September 11 and the London bombings in July. There was a strong sense that if Muslims were attacked in the media one day, the next day people would be targeted even more in playgrounds, in shopping malls, in the street and at work. This happened so regularly that it was considered unremarkable.

The Hijab

"I'm covering my hair – this seems to be big deal! I feel I'm constantly under surveillance now."

Manchester

"For 20 years, I had no problem wearing a hijab. Now you get intimidated in the street – stared at – and even challenged as a professional."

Leicester

"I am wearing a hijab: I find it difficult to get a job, even to walk the streets!"

Manchester

"A car was driving past my friend and they opened the car door on her, just because she was wearing the hijab."

Manchester

"My mum wears the hijab. She's a little old lady in her sixties. She lives in a white area. Now young kids are throwing things at her – bottles and cans – every time there's something in the media about Muslim extremism."

Manchester

"The first thing people see is my scarf."

London

"When you wear a hijab people stare at you! Someone even said to me one time 'aren't you hot in that? Why don't you take it off? . . . is the Taliban making you wear this?'"

London

"My aunt who is a British born East Londoner with a proper cockney accent and everything, she is also a convert and wears the niqab, you know the one where only your eyes are visible. She was shopping in Somerfield's one day and while picking up some fruits in the fruits and veg aisle an old Indian man nearby said to her – "Why don't you go back to your country!" she replied in her strong Cockney accent – "You go back to your country, I was born here you weren't!" This is the kind of discrimination women have to face – and this sort of thing happens regularly."

London

"I didn't used to wear hijab, but when I started, overnight I was called a fundamentalist."

Leicester

"Laws aren't against us – but mentalities are. People have such a wrong understanding of Islam. The first barrier is dress code."

London

"My mother lives in Queen's – a nice area of Birmingham – a girl had her scarf ripped off and she was knocked over. Nobody reports these things. People are reluctant to go to the police."

Birmingham

"I've only been wearing the hijab since last May, but before that how many times have I walked down the street and had Paki shouted at me? But I didn't bother reporting it."

Birmingham

"I'd love to wear hijab, but I do not want to draw attention to myself as a 'Muslim extremist'."

Birmingham

YOUNG WOMEN

"Once you become a practising Muslim wearing the hijab, it's difficult for you to be accepted on both sides. My family was shocked when I chose to marry a white man and made a conscious decision to be covered. This alienated my family. They wanted me to have a middle class comfortable lifestyle. As a result, I was not taken to weddings and other family functions because I remained covered and didn't dress up in the jingly jangly gear. I was shocked at the level of racism we received in Birmingham and I was a bit fearful of seeing people I knew before. My in-laws in Devon accepted me. I am not a submissive woman. 15 years ago if a woman was seen wearing a hijab people would cross the road. Now, I'll sit next to that same person on the bus. All sides however, accept my sister because she is not covered and my family are happy about this!"

Birmingham

Terrorism

Since 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq, young people feel very disillusioned. There is a lot of Islamophobia – racism has increased – it's getting worse."

Manchester

"Since 9/11, a lot of my friends say this isn't home anymore. They want to go somewhere they can get a decent job and live in harmony. They are doing courses – like post-grad teaching certificates – so they can go overseas to work. Britain will lose a lot of young skilled workers."

Manchester

"Terrorism affects our lives in England. But, even the 2nd or 3rd generations don't feel they belong anywhere else either."

Manchester

"When my brother went to the USA in 2001 after 9/11 they ripped open his suitcase and stuck orange tape on it, searched him and kept him overnight for questioning without good reason."

London

"When 9/11 happened one member of staff shouted at me, 'would you do that, would you kill?' I felt so upset!"

London

"After 9/11, we had all this stuff demonising us – even round here (Whitechapel) women were attacked."

London

"Muslims have to keep quiet about harassment. After 9/11 certain comments were made in our office. Management did not challenge it: I had to."

Birmingham

"It's portrayed that Muslim groups are extremist. But that's a very small minority – and they are not true Muslims."

London

"A lot of Islamic organisations are frightened to identify themselves as Muslim, because we are now viewed with suspicion. We tried to open a bank account for a course on teaching Arabic and were refused."

Manchester

"Women have got abused after 9 / 11. We have contributed to this country: if we did not like it here we'd leave. We are humans, before we are Muslim. Just because some people are doing terrible things, why blame the whole community?"

Birmingham

"I felt self-conscious after 7/7. A hijabi woman was spat on because of it. In central London a German man said to my friend as she was walking, "disgusting!" _ Since 7/7 Muslim people are unjustly feared, shouldn't there be a law against that?"

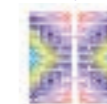
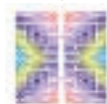
London

"Since the July bombing, women have had their scarves ripped off and are being spat at."

Birmingham

"One time I was on the bus and someone said to me, you haven't got a bomb in your bag have you? I turned around and said to them – your bag is bigger than mine, have you got one in yours?"

London



"When you are on the tube people look at you like you're about to blow up the tube!"

London

"Some one asked my son if he was Bin Laden in school."

Bradford

"I've noticed since 7/7 when you're getting on the train, even the driver looks at you to see what you're carrying!"

London

"My friend got checked going to Pakistan, they opened up her bag containing her personal female stuff in front of everyone!"

London

"When I go on holiday to Algeria they check us more because we're from Britain. You have to pay a bribe if you don't want to be checked. Muslims are doing this to other Muslims."

London

"When I hear the word terrorist I automatically think Muslim because I've been brought up in this environment."

London

"Bombers are identified by their faith. People have been labelled 'Islamists' or 'extremists'. The Muslim community feel ostracized and picked on. There's a rise in people feeling helpless but needing to do something to support Muslims."

Manchester

"Why should we pay the price for the so called Muslims who committed such an awful crime?"

Manchester

"Suicide bombers give the wrong impression about Islam.

However we have to bear in mind that the Americans are killing 1000 people at a time in Iraq, what are the Americans still doing there!"

London

YOUNG WOMEN

"We all have problems on London Transport – we all have stories about what happened to us on the bus or the tube, after the bombings."

London

"Because of the 9/11, the airport checks are really intrusive now."

London

"I was with a group of friends on Oxford Street and we were constantly stared at – I shouted out KABOOM! And some people jumped – sometimes you need to provoke them, they provoke us so you have to provoke them!"

London

Islamophobia and Racism

"There was an immense amount of racism when I was growing up. I'd very often see Pakistani girls who wore shalwar kameez (traditional South-Asian dress) at school being picked on and having their money taken off them."

Bradford

"I was one of the children in Bradford to be put in an immigration centre. These centres were there for children whose parents were from South Asian continents as the assumption was that we couldn't speak English. So we were all lumped together – I was born in Bradford!"

Bradford

"When I was having my fourth child (in 1986), I had very long hair and was dressed in a nightgown. A nurse walked in and started gesturing to me as if I couldn't speak or understand English. I was born in Wales and English was my first language, Bengali came much later! When I said to her this is my fourth child and I know how to bathe her, she was shocked. I didn't think that would happen to me again until two days ago. I went recently to a ward meeting, to be selected as a candidate. It was held in a pub – and I told them I had six children – they said, of course, we forgot you are Bengali! I realised nothing has changed since 1986!"

Leicester

"My brother was beaten up by the police and lost his eye. He got taken into the back of a police van and got beaten up. We didn't get any support from the Government or the police. They wouldn't accept blame. We didn't have much support from our own community, which was a shame. We got more support from the Black community. They suspended the officers from external duties to internal duty. No-one got charged or convicted of anything."

Manchester

"We notice they usually stop coloured people under 'stop and search' – not white people. But these people came here in the 50s and worked very hard for what they have got – they didn't steal it. They made a huge contribution; yet racism continues."

Manchester

"Lots of racism is indirect – you can't prove it."

London

We might be identified as middle class but on the street you're a black bitch or a "Paki" or whatever!"

Bradford

"A white colleague of mine came to me really upset the other day. She was in her car at traffic lights and there were two Asian boys in a car next to her and they stuck two fingers up to her. I said to her the amount of times that has happened to me in my life is immeasurable but it doesn't mean that I hate all the white community."

Bradford

"If I do well then I am an individual – people say how well I've done, it is patronising when people say 'oh how did you get over your community barriers?' But the moment I spit on the street it becomes oh how awful Muslims are!"

Bradford

"Colourising society by white and non-white and Muslim and non-Muslim – this is dangerous for communities and gives power to rightwing organisation."

Bradford

"Whenever I am in meetings I end up having to bring the perspective of my community and whether what they want to do is appropriate for particular communities. Most of those people who are in high positions are only concerned with the needs of the indigenous community."

Bradford

"I was asked to justify the cartoon debate. I said, which of you can speak for everyone? Does one Muslim holding a placard represent the whole community?"

Birmingham

"Gordon Brown stood there and said on national television if they (Muslims) want to be part of this country they need to integrate. How dare he suggest I am not part of this country? I am this country!"

Bradford

"We need to be able to report hate attacks. Some people don't like going to the police."

Birmingham

"Anti-discrimination laws do not apply to us equally!"

London

"Government should record crimes which are religiously aggravated."

Bradford

"We need to record hate crimes under different categories – separate race and faith."

Birmingham

"I don't even know what the hate crime legislation is!"

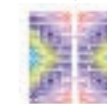
Bradford

"To draw parallels with the Irish community in this country, people stopped talking with Irish accents during the time of the mainland bombings. St Patrick's events disappeared in Birmingham for a good 20 years! This event [Listening to Muslim Women] is important to make sure we don't disappear."

Birmingham

"Muslims are being racist against the new communities coming in."

Birmingham



"The Asian community is negative towards the Somali community but we were in that same boat of racism and prejudice once. We should have learned from that."

Birmingham

"I overheard an Asian woman saying, 'these Somalis coming into the community, they're all criminals with phones, I don't feel safe'. When white people say that, they're challenged but she wasn't."

Birmingham

"We should learn about other cultures; it's important. I've done that and are the barriers any less? The glass ceiling is still there and we are still discriminated against."

Bradford

"A while ago during Ramadan I was at Kings Cross and saw some rubbish lying around near the bin, as I was about to pick it up to put it in the bin a man turned around and said to me – you people are always littering our stations!"

London

YOUNG WOMEN

"I am 17 years old and so far I've had a very positive experience. No experience of discrimination from outside of the community. I live in a community of mainly white Christians. I think we need to look at our common interests and less at our differences!"

Birmingham

2.2 Violence against women

Women chose to talk at length about their experiences of violence against women within communities and of their despair and anger at being unable to find help and support. In each event a large majority of women knew someone who had been forced into marriage. Women felt they could not go outside the community for help, as they feared ostracism. Those who did attempt to seek support found people to be unsympathetic. GPs within the community were not seen as reliable. It was perceived that GPs were liable to disclose confidential information about patients to their families. The issue of

domestic violence was also discussed by women in detail and there was a general consensus that mainstream refuges were not able to cater to the religious and cultural needs of Muslim women, resulting in many having no option but to stay in violent relationships or returning to them due to feeling alienated, isolated and desperate. The lack of support for women from abroad brought to the UK as wives and then abused was also highlighted. It was strongly emphasised that violence against women was not acceptable in Islam and some service providers and criminal justice agencies were condoning such practices by making allowances for what are in fact not Islamic, but cultural practices.

"Issues like honour killings, domestic violence and sexually transmitted diseases – we need to talk about these – they are major issues."

Birmingham

"This isn't tarring everyone with the same brush, but there is a growing disrespect amongst young Muslim men towards Muslim women. On Eid my cousin handed me an envelope with a load of papers in it and said, look what's come in the post. This guy had written a letter detailing a relationship he'd had with a Muslim girl, saying how she sleeps around, had a White boyfriend and an abortion. He'd done this and sent it to all the Muslims in the local area directory and her parents, naming her. It was horrific! Then when we all started talking my cousin told me about a girl she knew in Uni and how her boyfriend secretly filmed her in the shower and when he broke up with her, sent it to her parents. It's that issue of izzat [honour]."

Manchester

Forced Marriage

Case Study:

"I have a friend who wanted to marry someone; her family wouldn't accept it because he wasn't from the same caste. After a long time her family said ok we'll let you marry him in Pakistan so people here don't find out. It didn't work out and her mother gave her a ultimatum that you either forget about him or live here [Pakistan] for the rest of your life, she said ok I'll live here. She stayed in Pakistan in some village in the middle of nowhere, there were even snakes! Her parents said ok you can come back but you have to marry who we choose, so she said: ok, and came back to the UK. I went to visit her and her mother stayed in the room the whole time monitoring

everything. She wasn't allowed to go out, she wasn't allowed to sign on or have driving lessons. She was practically a prisoner in her house and it's quite ironic that her older sister is a probation officer and still this was accepted because she wanted to choose who she wanted to marry. We used to send messages to her underneath leaflets; that's how we'd communicate. I contacted the Home Office to find out what can be done about this, they basically said we can send the police over to the house and she would have to say she's not happy and then she could go, but obviously she couldn't really do that, because it's about honour in the community and that kind of thing. She was saying, can they not just take me from the house and then ask me, how can I answer? But the problem with the police was that she would have to say that she wants to go. In the end I told her to write everything down in a letter and that would probably give her consent, but her dad found that letter. Luckily by that time I had smuggled a phone to her so we could communicate. When I realised I didn't have the letter I texted her saying I hadn't got it and she realised her dad had found it, so she left home. We took her to our house and we got the mosques involved and they got in contact with a different mosque from a different community, they got involved and contacted the dad and told the dad. Now she's back at home they are emotionally blackmailing her and are very reluctantly accepting this marriage. But the problem was her local mosque knew what was happening but they turned a blind eye to it because the community where she comes from are a very close-knit community and nobody wanted to get involved. It all relates to communities not recognising issues even though the issues are there. Also about service providers not recognising the cultural issues because it is difficult for women to say: I'm going. It's fine to say women have to find that strength within themselves but if they've been brought up within this community and family they don't want to hurt them either when trying to get their rights."

Manchester

"My brother has just gone to Pakistan and has had an arranged marriage. To me it's still forced because he's been hounded for 4 years to get married."

London

"I know girls taken abroad, or forced into marriage because of their sexuality. There is constant pressure. I was taken to Pakistan on holiday, in my last year at university. I was kept in a room 24 hours a day, until I agreed to a marriage. I had come out (as a lesbian) to my family years before and the relatives in Pakistan said – bring her here, we'll sort her out. I was forced into marriage. Although many people oppose forced marriage, I find a lot of people say it's ok for lesbians – they are doing it for your own good."

London

"The BBC was making a programme on forced marriage and honour killing, (again) and they focused as usual on how white people react to it. They should film the Muslim community and let us express our shock, and our opposition to it!"

Birmingham

"She was forced into an arranged marriage when she was 16 and escaped and went into a refuge. She got her strength from Islam and went to a specialist refuge for South Asian women."**(woman in question didn't wish to recount this herself and asked the woman sitting next to her to tell the story on her behalf).**

Birmingham

"The Government should do something about forced marriage. It shouldn't be allowed. Parents should be heavily fined."

Birmingham

"Women suffer from a lot of mental health issues to do with forced marriages, domestic violence and immigration problems."

Bradford

"Forced marriage is a red herring being used by Government and media. Of course it does exist and is a problem we need to address; but why have they chosen forced marriage as such a huge issue and highlighted the Muslim community again as community where this happens?"

Bradford

"Forced marriage is much less now than it used to be; it will eradicate itself as time goes on."

Bradford

"I wish Government was so quick and ready to address issues of under-achievement as they are of forced marriage."

Bradford

"By minimising our problems on domestic violence and forced marriage it will not disappear. It has to be addressed. Women would rather die in their silence – we need confident women; we don't need shattered, battered women."

Bradford



"We don't need negative policies as it does nothing for our profile."

Bradford

"Government needs to stop making it an Islamic problem; it is a global problem."

Bradford

Domestic Violence

"There's on-going issues of domestic violence in all communities. We have a culture within Britain of aggression and violence. My partner grew up in Leicester and there your movements are so restricted. They have networks of taxi drivers reporting on girls and where they've been. You could get a real beating at home for being in a place where it was considered you shouldn't have been."

London

"Domestic violence affects **all** women – not just us. 'Ashram' just works with Asian women – but the funding has now stopped. We need to sustain these projects. The Government must mainstream and continue their funding and roll them out more widely, where a model works. We do not need to start brand new projects every few years! We do not share enough good practice across the countries."

Birmingham

"The way front line workers treat violence against women, they have no idea of the kind of problems Muslim women face. A woman facing domestic violence – she is trapped – she can't go and get help. There are no proper shelters she can go to. We need proper training to ensure women can access the right services."

London

"Domestic violence might happen to men, but it's mainly women. A friend of mine is in the police – he says the first hit will then inevitably be followed by a fall down stairs. We need to educate women to ask for help straightaway. We need to reach women through schools."

Birmingham

"When it comes to domestic violence there should be a zero tolerance policy and the Government shouldn't allow mitigating circumstances such as culture, to play a part. We've had calls from the probation service asking if domestic violence is justified in Islam because we have a man here saying it is! They shouldn't allow cultural justifications for such crimes."

Birmingham

"Muslim men sometimes think they are born with the right to hit women and Muslim women think that it's religious, but it's not –Islam does not allow this!"

Birmingham

"The Prophet (PBUH) said: A man should act like a lamb within the home and as a lion outside the home. So why do some men beat up their wives and abuse them in order to exercise their strength and power over them? The roles of men and women are different but their rights are exactly the same."

London

"My first marriage had a lot of domestic violence. In the community, it's accepted, but it is not on! I have seen white women coming into work with black eyes. This is not about Islam, it is a male thing: we need all women to say, zero tolerance. But women do not know that under Islam, they are equal to men. I was lucky – my father told me, you do not have to put up with this! You can divorce him!"

Birmingham

We are human – we are in the UK now. We have to support each other. In Somalia, women are told: go back to your husband – let him beat you again! Some husbands here in UK, if you say I want to go to university, they tell their wives to stay at home. We need your help to get out into the community.

Leicester

"Sometimes we see domestic violence as husbands abusing wives, but sometimes it's mother-in-laws abusing. Women need to know they can't let anyone knock their confidence. In Islam, women have rights to many things including their own home"

London

"We need to remember the effects of domestic violence on children. If the kids see the father beating the mother up, they will think it is ok."

Birmingham

"There aren't very many domestic violence services sensitive to Muslim women's needs. There aren't very many refuges that Muslim women would want to go to."

London

"If we can only offer standard refuges, Muslim women will often just go back home and take more abuse – they need refuges for Muslim women."

Leicester

"Women survivors are rehoused in areas outside the community, where they will be harassed and subject to racial abuse."

Birmingham

"Young girls coming from Pakistan who might have domestic violence issues and have no language skills, are left alone. They have no help and support and are left without passports."

Bradford

"If the boy is from here and brings a girl from Pakistan, there are so many problems."

Birmingham

"Women from abroad have no one to turn to if they are being abused at home. They are afraid of being deported."

Birmingham

"They come to India and they want a servant to cook and clean for their parents. One of my friends lives with her mother-in-law, which is why I'm afraid to call her. I would like to write about how it really is for girls here, so that parents (in India) can know what happens to their daughters."

London

"We leave everything – our parents and everything – to live a happy life and we come here [UK] and it's all wrong. Boys here are mummy's boys!"

London

Case study:

"People from here go back home for wives and say we're going to take you to England, let you go to college, and work. But when we get here they don't let us do anything, don't let us go out or work. We don't know if their family is religious or modern. If we end up getting married to a religious boy we remain housewives and not allowed to work or go out. My in-laws are very religious. As soon as I got here my husband said you have to live with my mum and dad and not go out and be a housewife. So I'm stuck, we don't know where to get help, we end up having to stay in the house and they can do what they want and torture us. They say we are not allowed to call our parents.

One day I was so depressed and went to my GP. She was Asian and I spoke to her in our language and she told me where to go and get help. But I still didn't do anything. The community is so small and everyone knows everyone else. We can't just go to the police if we are beaten, because of our culture. So many daughter-in-laws are in this situation. I know about ten in this situation.

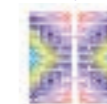
All us girls from India are treated as slaves. One of my friends just had a baby and her mother-in-law makes her do all the work – even ironing the bed sheets. It happens in India too but there's no organisation there to help.

I'm the only daughter and my mum and dad said if you don't want to live with him get a divorce. But not all parents are the same. I left my husband 2 years ago. He did emotionally torture me – wouldn't let me go anywhere. One time he took my passport from me took me to India, and came back to the UK with my passport and ticket so I couldn't come back. We called the big priest and he called my in-laws and told them off and said "if you don't want her just finish things". Then they came and we had a compromise. I came back and he took my passport again. I told him I'm not the same girl as five years ago, I know the law and if I call the police you'll have to give it to me. I called the police but no-one answered and he snatched the phone and locked it in a cupboard.

They (my in-laws) put conditions on me and said I had to sign a contract saying I can't contact my mum and dad, I can't go out and talk to my friends and I have to listen to them. My husband and in-laws said if I didn't sign the contract I would have to go. My husband said, "I'll get my solicitor to sign it. I said, "I want someone's advice" and they said, "you will have to leave. They said they would call the police if I didn't leave. I have some relatives in London and my husband dropped me there. I still love him and call him but he doesn't want me. He has a girlfriend. I've applied for my Islamic divorce, I don't want to but I have to as I have no choice. My mum and dad said, you just get a divorce and then you can marry whichever boy you want to.

If I get some education and get a job I can stand on my own two feet. I'm going to college and get a grant to study. I'm in (an Asian) refuge and I get help but if I was on my own, I wouldn't get the grant. I want to become a teacher and teach young children. I'm doing a diploma in childcare."

London



"Other things are starting to be discussed within the community, but definitely not sexual abuse."

Manchester

Crime in the name of honour

"I know a Muslim boy who murdered his cousin, because she fell in love with someone 'unsuitable'. He says: she was doing 'haram'. These ideas don't come from him: they come from the imams."

London

"Honour killings and forced marriage are the most important issues in our community!"

Birmingham

Cardiff Women's Safety Unit - Survivor Forum

The Cardiff Women's Safety Unit (WSU) was established in 2001 – this multi-agency initiative works with a wide range of organisations (including the police and the Crown Prosecution Service) and offers a comprehensive range of specialist services at one referral point to women who have survived domestic violence and/or known perpetrator rape. The WSU offers: target hardening; counselling; advocacy; legal services; and refuge provision to women and their children; deliver domestic violence training sessions to people working in the South Wales area; and help streamline domestic violence procedures in Cardiff courts.

The Survivor's Forum offers support to women once they are out of risk by providing a safe space to meet, support each other and build networks. The Forum also acts as a sounding board for consultations and proposed services relating to domestic violence and sexual violence. The Forum offers a safe and diverse environment to support women survivors.



Section 3 ENABLING ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Employment

Women felt that in addition to the glass ceiling and barriers to promotion faced by all women, choosing to wear the hijab or wishing to use breaks to pray whilst at work added to discrimination. Many described being refused jobs once prospective employers saw them wearing the hijab. Many women also believed the stereotypes employers held about them as Muslim women hindered their careers.

"There is great talent amongst women in the Muslim community – we can make a great contribution to the economy."

Birmingham

"I had a development interview to go into management; I had started my post-graduate qualification, they wanted to give me a mentor, but there are no Muslim women in a senior position, so I still have not been given a mentor. Recently I attended a big NHS conference on BME issues, but I still see no BME or women in senior positions two years later."

Birmingham

"I live in Surrey (not many Muslim women there!); when I applied to jobs, they wouldn't accept me. They wanted me to look for work in Central London or Tooting where the population is more diverse. I am qualified as a pharmacy technician, but I had to retrain to get work here."

London

"How reflective are employment panels of the community?"

Birmingham

"Muslim women are under-represented in employment both in the private and public sector. Promotional opportunities are not available. White counterparts get promoted over you."

Bradford

"Employment is an important issue. For women who home work, their work is invisible and they receive no benefits or recognition for the work they do."

Bradford

"People listen to men more than women. There is segregation in careers – Muslim women need to go into media jobs."

London

"To your face, no-one says anything. But when people see me dressed like this – the barriers come up. If I want a job in a bank or in Parliament – I wouldn't get very far. Female Parliamentarians don't wear the hijab."

London

Muslims get refused jobs all the time, because of their faith, or because they're wearing the hijab."

London

"A lot of women have good qualifications and don't get jobs because of the way they dress, because they wear hijab."

London

"I am doing Business Admin and I am sure if I go and work in a mixed office, I won't be treated well – (woman who wears jalbab)."

Birmingham

"Officially, you can't be told not to wear hijab. The problem is the attitude of the people you work with."

Birmingham

"My dad, who works at Heathrow Airport, tried to get me a summer job there. My application form was accepted, but after I sent in a photo of myself wearing the hijab, my application was unsuccessful."

London

"Anecdotal evidence shows if women go to interviews with hijab – they don't get the job; if they go without it, they get the job. Have we got the data to show where Muslim women are in the labour force – are they all stuck in low skill, low paid jobs?"

Birmingham



"I was promised a job over the phone. When they saw me in my hijab, they turned me down. I was so hurt."

Manchester

"I would not be too comfortable going out to work in a hijab." (Student)

Birmingham

"The employer may not forbid things, but the problem is the reaction you get from other people! I came here first from Pakistan just after 9/11 and I encountered problems."

Birmingham

"My husband works in a firm and he felt unable to ask colleagues to cover his phone so he could have 10 minutes to pray."

Birmingham

"My sister is not allowed to pray at work. She has to clock in and out – it's ok for someone who wants to go on a cigarette break; they don't have to clock in and out!"

Birmingham

"People see you as different. It's the way people look at you that's the problem. If I wanted time for prayer, I could ask for it – but it made me feel different. As a hospital doctor, I couldn't take time for prayer – I felt I was imposing on people."

Birmingham

"I should get Eid automatically off. Everyone else gets Christmas and Easter and I have to take these days off!"

Birmingham

"When I was working, I wasn't allowed to take Eid off."

Birmingham

"If you are employing someone who is Muslim, you need to provide prayer rooms. There needs to be education around the history of Islam, not just that we wear hijab!"

Bradford

"Prayer rooms should be available automatically: we shouldn't need to ask."

Birmingham

"We need a multi-faith room in every work place."

Birmingham

"It took me a long time to persuade my employer to provide a multi-faith room."

Birmingham

"All employers have a duty of care to employees; this should include the right to pray and have your faith respected."

Birmingham

"This perception of, 'they have to fit into our environment', is not helpful. If they are a good employer they will cater for the diverse needs of their employees as it will be conducive to happier employees and therefore more profits, which is what business is about."

Bradford

"Some women find it difficult – about shaking hands. I just say: 'my faith doesn't permit me to shake your hand'."

Birmingham

"Male colleagues will put their arm round you – I am not comfortable with that. If you tell them, they will stop."

Birmingham

"Even eye contact is a problem. In many Muslim countries, you don't look your employer in the eye: it's disrespectful. But here people think you are just shifty if you don't."

Birmingham

"This after-work drink thing – everyone goes off to the pub. We can't go. They select a restaurant for the team, but they don't think about making sure I have a halal meal. So I end up having to eat vegetarian or nothing. Then they wrote in my report: 'She's not a team player – she doesn't socialise!'"

Birmingham

"At Christmas parties, management will buy alcohol but no soft drinks. My director bought wine for everyone, so I had to ask for orange juice. At work everyone was bought a bottle of wine as a reward. They just left me out – they didn't give me anything. I was told I could sue her for discrimination!"

Birmingham

"24-hour drinking will make it worse – the pressure on all of us, especially young people."

London

"Employers still have very stereotypical views about Muslim women."

Bradford

"I have trained over 600 managers in the last 3 years. They've had very stereotypical views of Muslim women."

Bradford

"Muslim male managers think you don't count either!"

Birmingham

"I am Bengali and I am a practising Muslim. There is a cultural barrier to getting out of the community. When I came here, I wanted to go out to work – but I was the odd one out; I saw all the other women staying at home. People talked about women being out at work: it was very rare. But now, my daughter is nearly 30 – she can take a job. It's so different for her. But the Somali, Turkish, and Bengali communities – it's still difficult. You can be a doctor – that's ok, but for a woman to start a business: it's a man's world. We're still the odd one out!"

London

YOUNG WOMEN

"A friend of mine went to 10 job interviews, 8 with a hijab and 2 without the hijab – she got the two jobs she went for without wearing the hijab!"

Birmingham

"I didn't have problems getting a job. I do community type work. I don't always want to be seen as a Muslim girl in a head scarf; I have other interests as well and don't represent all Muslim women!"

Birmingham

QED-UK

QED-UK was founded in Bradford in 1990 to campaign for a level playing field, where people from all backgrounds are able to play a full role in society. The charity focuses mainly on those of South Asian origin, many of whom are Muslims and who make up over two-thirds of the ethnic minority population of Yorkshire and the Humber.

They have set up the Policy Makers Network to help people to take up places on decision-making bodies so that they can contribute to public life. There are now 80 members, who receive mentoring and support to enable them to apply for positions and gain the skills and self-confidence needed to succeed in their new roles.

The latest project, Narrowing The Gap, is aimed at reducing the 30 per cent difference in employment rates between people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds and the general population. The project is especially targeting women, and will work with 35 community groups to help 2,000 people to become economically active in the Yorkshire region, with 500 securing jobs.

Most of these initiatives tackle the supply side of the labour market, but QED-UK believe that it is equally important to tackle the demand side of equation by working with employers. Many business people have negative views of minority ethnic communities in general and Muslim groups in particular.

Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD)

The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) has produced guidance giving practical information on direct and indirect discrimination and religious observance for personnel officers in the public and private sectors. This includes details about the observance of religious holidays and religious practices, such as prayers during work hours. It also covers detailed issues related to social interaction at events during and outside working hours that may indirectly disadvantage or exclude Muslims. For example, 'the after-work drinks in the pub', while a common social event for the majority of workers, may be uncomfortable for Muslims to participate in.



Section 4

ATTITUDES WITHIN SOCIETY

4.1 Identity and Integration

Two thirds of Muslims identify as British.² Many women felt that the so-called 'Muslim identity crisis' is a media myth, but others reported feeling excluded and alienated by other people's attitudes. There was a sense of irritation and confusion about the constant demands on Muslims to 'integrate'. Women felt that they are British and proud to be. Many felt that calls for them to be 'integrated' into a country they already feel part of, have racist and xenophobic overtones, which make them feel rejected by the majority community. There was strong support for multi-cultural and multi-faith communication. Women felt there was a lack of communication amongst all faiths and that this was something all communities should tackle together.

Multiple Identities

"What is Britishness?"
Manchester

"We don't fit into a box and shouldn't have to."
Manchester

"Some of us are born here – we consider ourselves British!"
Birmingham

"Why should we have to identify as Muslims? – I feel I need to in light of current issues."
Manchester

"The Muslim community is a diverse community. There are differences between Muslims from India, Pakistan and East Africa – particular communities are doing well whilst others are not."
Manchester

"The Muslim community is so different. The way people are brought up has an impact on how they view themselves."
London

"The Muslim community is quite different across different towns and cities in the UK – in Birmingham, Manchester, Leicester – you see a real contrast in how Islam is practised."

Manchester

"The Government needs to promote the fact that you can be British and Muslim."

Leicester

"I want to keep my culture alive – I am a Bengali woman, I have to keep my identity alive – so I don't wear western dress."

London

"People are more open here than any other European country."

Swiss woman living in London

"There is a lot more temptation in the western world, but I personally think we're a lot safer here compared to somewhere like Saudi Arabia or Algeria. When I got to Algeria and walking down the street with my family with my hijab on I get more comments from men over there than I do here, they even try and touch you!"

London

"We have to realise there's an identity problem for our children. We need to be aware of the problems our children face. Our children need to be confident about their Islam and that can only happen through women knowing about their religion. For example it doesn't mean that if I am a Muslim I can't have a career."

Bradford

"Converts have to prove themselves more. My convert friends not only feel they have to prove themselves more but they also get questioned more by their own community, as in why have you done that, you don't look like them, why have you started wearing hijab?"

Manchester

"There are higher expectations of converts amongst some Muslim communities, hypocritically so."

Manchester

YOUNG WOMEN

"My 3rd sister married a black Muslim guy. My dad eventually accepted him but my mum hasn't. The community hasn't accepted it either. I've got two nieces who are fantastic, they're both learning Arabic!"
Birmingham

"The media hype up the so called 'identity crisis' for young people – for me, my religion is more important than my nationality or where I was born. The media make us feel more alienated than we actually are."

London

"Being a Yemeni Muslim and British, I feel the push from both sides!"

Birmingham

"There's a generation gap – this is a family thing: our parents find it hard to understand what the norm is here. But we were all born here, it's different for us."

London

"My mum married quite young and was dependent on my dad's income all her life. She brought me up to rely on myself. They said it was ok if I married outside the community, but I still felt limited. I knew if I brought home someone Black, Chinese or Arab it would be a problem!"

Birmingham

"There needs to be an amalgamation between culture and identity. There are always perceptions from other people, your family and the community and now fellow Muslims. You feel at times you are undermined and can't be the person you want to be. Why can't I just be a person who went to university and has a degree? That would always be secondary!"

Birmingham

Integration

"What's the definition of integration? What does it mean for me as a Muslim woman? How do we integrate? The definition needs to be clear."

Manchester

"I have a problem with the word 'integrated'. To me that means becoming like the host community. It's about learning from each other."

Manchester

I was born a Muslim. You are told that to get married makes you a better Muslim. I thought if I got married, I could change my sexuality. I'm a transsexual; I believe I was born in the wrong body. I've tried everything to change, and I couldn't. People say, be honest; but you can't. I have now lost my children; I am allowed to see them, but only on condition that I don't change (my sex). This is how Muslims treat me – even though there are Muslim countries where operations to change your sex are available."

London

"We need to be more visible as Muslim lesbians."

London

"We must be seen as complete people – but we are defined by the sexual act."

London

"If we reject people on the basis of faith, race, gender identity and sexuality you lose all the good things they can bring to the community. We all have multiple identities."

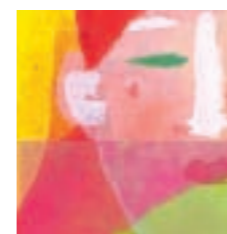
Manchester

"The Women's Movement is full of feminists and academics; can we be like that? I'm apprehensive about discussions about feminism."

Birmingham

"Don't confuse the Women's Movement, the Muslim Women's Network and Women's National Commission with feminists! Often feminists are anti-Muslim."

Birmingham



² 2001 Census

"We need to ensure that integration does not become an issue – we should not allow policy makers to identify integration as a problem!"

Manchester

"In an English environment if you complain, they say, "Oh, Muslims don't want to integrate; this isn't a Muslim country". We each have to battle with this."

Birmingham

"Islam works within Britain; too often Islam and Britain are seen in contradictory terms!"

Manchester

"Islam has been part of Europe for centuries!"

Manchester

"Why doesn't the wider society learn about our culture? – We have to learn about Christmas!"

Manchester

"We keep being told, we need to learn about the "British way of life, – does this mean we have to go out and get drunk every Friday?"

Birmingham

"It is very difficult growing up as a young Muslim girl in a western country."

London

"There are issues in France about banning Jewish skullcaps, hijab, crucifixes – how long before it comes over here?"

Manchester

"I went to a school with a 50 /50 split of asians and white people. I am still in touch with some of my white friends and if they were here right now they'd say we learned more about Muslims and Muslim culture from being in school with you. But what's happening in schools now is there are pockets of predominantly White schools and Asian schools. If Asians move into a white area, the white people leave and I have seen that happen."

Bradford

"The community cohesion agenda is a Government agenda which has been imposed on the Muslim community!"

Manchester



"Different parts of the UK have different agendas, how can communities engage in that?"

Manchester

"We need more fun days and open events to break down barriers and extend understanding and tolerance."

Birmingham

"It's organisations who are segregating communities."

Birmingham

"The Government should run events bringing communities together instead of having segregated events."

Birmingham

"In some small private communities maybe women don't mix. In Birmingham, people only go to certain mosques, everyone's segregated, so what does that mean?"

Birmingham

"People feel more confident to take first steps with their own community and then as confidence builds they can progress."

Birmingham

"We have great community projects in Gloucestershire; we need to be proud of being British and Muslim!"

Birmingham

"We have to move away from this 'victim' mentality. We need to be at the heart of mainstream society to influence change for the better."

Bradford

"Most people who come from abroad still feel like they are back home, and tourists here. By the time 10, 20 years pass and generations and they still refuse to believe they won't be going back. Language is a problem; many people have been here for years without knowing English."

Manchester

"Every job you have, you have to declare your nationality. No wonder people still feel Pakistani, when they have to write it everywhere!"

Birmingham

Multi-cultural communication

"Do we know about Christianity and other cultures? It's a two way process, we as Muslim women need to know what other women are about. We have to educate ourselves not only about our religion but others' too."

Bradford

"I came back to Bradford and taught in a white school. I was told that I could easily get a job in Bradford, as many schools were predominantly Muslim. I made a decision to teach in a majority white school as I wanted children to have communication with a Muslim, non-white person, as where they were based they would never have contact with any Black people."

Bradford

"Unless we learn to communicate with each other we will never understand each other."

Bradford

"We need increased communication with other religions and cultures."

Birmingham

"There are new communities growing and it will take time to build links but we can't have racism creeping in now, much better communication is needed now."

Birmingham

"Muslim groups are not all the same, we can discuss things with the different groups as well as with non Muslims, let everyone hear the views."

Birmingham

"Everyone's always highlighting problems of Muslim women, that's why Rehanah's³ talk was really good, she talked about her job, that was constructive. Even with today's event, not dissing it, but heard all of this before, we know Islam liberates women. We need better communication, we need more events to say this is what we do in the community in London, in Manchester, and this is what's happening rather than discussing it all the time."

Birmingham

"What we get all the time in the media [is] it's our problem; we don't integrate; and that racism is a figment of our imagination because if we integrate those problems won't exist. That willingness exists amongst all of us. I certainly wanted to integrate when I came to this country at the age of 18. I was already typecast as a terrorist because I was from Iran! I was searched all the time wherever I went. That automatically put a label on me that I was different although I didn't think I was. I was told straight away from the word go from the way I was treated at immigration that I was different. That put me in my place! I didn't intend to segregate myself – I was already segregated! This is what policy makers need to realise and tackle – this level of racism."

Manchester

"If we see what happened in the UK this summer, they were British born. How can some one brain wash them? Because they feel isolated, they don't feel they belong to Iraq or Pakistan or wherever their parents were from and don't feel British either."

[Referring to the July bombings]

Manchester

"If young people are constantly battling negative perceptions about them is that not going to erode their self-confidence?"

Bradford

"I know a lot of people who want to leave (Britain). I do – I don't feel I belong here, even though I was born in Leicester. I am made to feel I don't belong, that I should polish up my qualifications and get a job abroad."

Manchester

YOUNG WOMEN

"One of the reasons as a community we haven't achieved that much is that we haven't come together as a Muslim community – they identify in small groups whether as Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Gujarati. That will change with young people because we don't care what country people come from."

Bradford



³ Rehanah Sadiq, who is a Muslim Chaplain at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Trust and Birmingham Women's Hospital NHS Trust, was the keynote speaker at the Birmingham event on 09 February 2006.

Case Study:

"My dad was from Somalia and I was born in Ethiopia. My mother died when I was four. My father and five brothers were killed in front of me in Somalia. My father was a very rich man and now I'm on income support here. My husband forced me to sign over all my father's property to him. I never cried, my father and brothers' bodies lay in front of me and I smiled and cooked because I had to protect my children – if I cry they kill me also. With six children I walked to get out of Somalia. Some people even took \$100,000 from me but there was nothing; I walked with my children. I was in a wheelchair by the time I got to Holland. They operated and found I had cancer in my back. I was ill for 5 years. Always try, sometimes it's important to trust yourself, trust other people. Religion is not opposed to anyone, you should respect all people."

Leicester

YOUNG WOMEN

"My mum had four children – I was taught by both my parents and my friends outside. I've got friends who are non-Muslims. We should look at people as individuals. When we learn about people's cultures you become more tolerant."

Birmingham

4.2 Education

The low expectations of Muslim children and especially girls, was a recurring theme. It was often linked to women's experiences of teachers with stereotypical views about Muslim girls lacking ambition and not being allowed by their families to pursue higher education and careers. Muslims are still the least likely of any faith group to have a degree and one-third have no qualifications, but this is changing: Muslims under 30 who were born in the UK are twice as likely to have a degree as those born overseas.⁴

It was strongly felt that the National Curriculum must be modified in order to reflect the diverse cultures and experiences of children today. Women criticised the National Curriculum for being almost entirely focused on western European culture. Women also felt that Muslim parents needed to take a more proactive role and to get involved in educational institutions by becoming school governors and putting more into their child's education. This elicited some debate around the

perceived difficulty of becoming a governor. Women felt more information was needed specifically aimed at women. Although Muslim governors were still a rarity, they were mainly men. There was also a call for both Muslim and non-Muslim children to be taught about the diversity of Islam. For example, women highlighted that Islam is practised differently right across the UK and the world and called for this to be reflected in the National Curriculum.

Teaching & Careers Advice

"Assumptions are made by teachers and career advisers about young Muslim women that they won't want to have a career."

Manchester

"I was told by my history teacher that I'd be barefoot and pregnant by the time I was 16 so I could relax and have a good time in these classes! Consistently throughout my education I've always come across these barriers. In terms of young Muslim women this has to be tackled, the careers advice they get is crap!"

Manchester

"I've worked as a teacher for five years and have just left teaching. I do hear teachers say 'oh, why bother teaching them because they're not going to go into the work place and not going to get jobs', it's not necessarily about going into the workplace, they are still part of the community, they have a right to an education!"

Manchester

"Muslim women may not want an education for getting a job, but for the sake of education!"

Manchester

"We need to address the issue of low educational expectations in order to tackle the underachievement of Bangladeshi and Pakistani pupils in the education system!"

Manchester

"I have special needs children and two girls who are blind, but Mashallah (thank God) they are very confident children: I instilled that in them. I have a constant battle because I don't think they are being encouraged in school. Teachers just don't care. In schools where 98% of children are Asian, and the teachers are white – they just write our children off."

Bradford

"Economic capital in terms of education, opportunities and so forth are so important. I get nothing from my children's school. I wrote them a letter to ask how he's doing in school and got nothing from them. I don't know if my son gets the right education and will achieve what he wants. It is so important for me that he gets confidence and doesn't experience discrimination. For me, I think he isn't respectful as much as I feel he should be. He comes home from school and says to me this is liberation; stop dictating to me! This kind of thing is coming from his school culture. I don't want to enforce my ideas and beliefs on my son. I want him to have the ability to choose, and teachers and schools should help us to do that."

Bradford

"My daughter has an RE teacher who is telling them that if you follow Christianity you will go to heaven; the implication being that if you are not Christian, you won't go to heaven! My daughter gets her religious education at home but the rest of the class doesn't!"

Bradford

"Not only parents teach their children – teachers have a great influence and sometimes children don't always listen to their parents."

London

"I'm not impressed with schools or teachers. It's the responsibility of teaching staff to know about the religion of the children they teach in order to be sensitive to needs. Teachers take a part in bringing up a child; they should be sensitive to their needs, whether culturally or religiously. Most Muslim children will go to a madrassah after school to learn another language and that is considered as nothing! It's not nothing, it's amazing and teachers should know about it."

Manchester

"When you are undergoing your teacher training, you only receive a one-hour lecture on ethnic minorities and a one-hour lecture on dealing with children with disabilities – very little on faith, if at all!"

Manchester

"There is little or no support for ethnic minority teachers and there is racism within teaching amongst staff! If they see you as an ethnic minority they will pick on you and say, ok, you are now the expert on race; and you might not be."

Manchester

"There is a lack of training opportunities – the government should promote careers in architecture, engineering and other traditionally male professions."

Birmingham

"We need educated women at local level also – if everyone goes into major professions, what will happen to our community?"

Birmingham

Schools, Universities & Madrassahs

"I don't think **everyone** (on the staff of a school) should know about Islam, but the head teacher must. There are girls at a school in Birmingham that are given a dirty store cupboard to pray in! The Government must train teachers on this."

Birmingham

"Some schools don't even recognise or acknowledge the specific dietary requirements of their pupils, i.e. halal food."

Manchester

"My niece waited years to get into a school and when she got in she was told she could only go to the school if she removed her hijab. It's just a piece of cloth! Would you rather have a disruptive student? How does the hijab affect your teaching?"

Manchester



"There seems to be a segregation happening in parts of London, where you have schools where the majority are white or Asian. I'm concerned for my son who goes to a school where there are only a few white people. He's going to come out of that environment and face the things I face, like racism, when I'm trying to teach him about Islam and about the values of this country, like the importance of voting. But when he gets out of school and goes into society, what is he going to find?"

London

"I have no faith in school to educate my children – because they write our children off. When you mix with other cultures and communities your perceptions are challenged and you grow. In Bradford this isn't happening; our children are ghettoised in schools."

Bradford

"As a parent, you can't write to OFSTED to complain! We should be able to ask them to arbitrate – as an independent body."

Birmingham

"I am very worried about giving schools more control – they have enough already!"

Birmingham

"I'd like Government to know there's a problem with schools. I have seen governors who are just yes-men to the head teachers. More devolution to schools will make them even less accountable – head teachers are already demigods."

Birmingham

"The problem is with the men – they stop women standing as governors."

Birmingham

"I am wary of creating a tokenistic Muslim woman on a school board. The board will be very white, male, middle-class – they will do deals outside the meetings.

The women will feel isolated and may not attend meetings."

Birmingham

"We are fed up with token women. You end up with one woman on every board and she's still ignored. You need more than one woman. Those of us who are the only women on the board – we should be pushing for changes so that there is more than one woman."

Birmingham

"When you're applying for a place at university, some of them ask for photo identification. Shouldn't the selection criteria be based on results and not on your name and what you look like? Apparently this is done under the Race Relations Act to ensure effective equal opportunities monitoring."

London

"Imperial College London banned the wearing of the jilbaab (and the hoody) for security reasons – I accept that, as there is no obligation in Islam to wear it, but isn't it a woman's right to wear it if she wants to?"

London

"Universities don't only look at grades but what you do in extracurricular activities; it doesn't take into account cultural differences. Many people from BME communities are very family-orientated or do extracurricular activities within their communities. These are western concepts, for example, learning ballet, or playing the piano."

Bradford

"In some top universities you find the majority of students are white – there is some hidden racism going on there."

Bradford

"We **must** scrap tuition fees – it keeps Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls out of University – I'm still paying for mine!." **Young Muslim woman, to much applause**

London

"Government should carry out an audit on universities to determine how many students are from BME groups."

Bradford

"Stigma is attached to university life – that it involves drinking and moral issues and halls culture."

Bradford

"My in-laws wouldn't let me go to college because it was mixed – if it was just for girls maybe they would have let me go. As subjects go English language classes would be easy to attend but not any form of higher education because they think that if we know more than they do they won't be able to control us. My husband didn't open a bank account for me. When I tried to open one I couldn't because he had my bills and papers. One day my husband enrolled me in all subjects at college. When we got home he told my mother-in-law and she told him "no, she can't go. I didn't let my own daughter go so how can I let her go?" Boys from here [UK] may have been brought up here but they still have Indian mentality."

London

"The opportunity to have single sex accommodation at university would alleviate parents' concerns."

Bradford

"My parents expected to be at the bottom of the barrel and they pushed us to go university so that we wouldn't be at the bottom. My brothers went to university and after that worked as waiters – so young men will ask themselves is university going to be worthwhile?"

Manchester

"Islamic schools – they get Government funding and they have to follow Government rules – which mean you only get a short time to teach Islam in the curriculum. I went to an Islamic school and I was taught parrot fashion, because of lack of time."

Birmingham

"Our children learn Islam in Arabic: they parrot it, but they do not understand it. My children speak English: they don't speak Arabic. So they learn the Quran parrot fashion. We should send our children to learn Islam in English."

Birmingham

"Proper education should be funded. We know funds are available: the problem is accessing it."

Birmingham

"Government needs to give scholarships to women who are trying to educate themselves and educate themselves about their faith and rights."

Bradford

"Ours is a Government-funded after-school club – they do their homework there, and learn Arabic. When you open up to people, they will give you funding."

Birmingham

"The schools could have extra lessons in after-school clubs, on Islam. It is parents' choice about whether their children learn Islam. I work for Connexions – I also work voluntarily to support a madrassah. The Government are 100% behind us. We started with 30 children – we now have 70. All our staff are qualified, and we've got funding."

Birmingham

"Young Muslim girls and women need to utilise after-school clubs. Muslim women need to participate in extra-curricular activities – and maybe the madrassas need to play a more proactive role in ensuring better engagement in schools!"

Manchester

"In Gloucester, the madrassah is set up on school premises: that ensures it is safe and well run. All the Muslim children from the area can attend. They learn why we do things in Islam."

Birmingham

"I worked at an Islamic-based girls' school. There are no female governors at the school. They recently advertised for governors and sent out letters addressed Mr so-and-so, indicating that it was for men only."

Leicester

"Most of these schools were set up in a sexist manner to control our girls and keep them 'safe'! It was the men who set them up and would act as governors!"

Leicester



YOUNG WOMEN

"My mother married young and was not very educated, but wanted me to be educated. I chose to study away from home. There was furore from the community because I didn't study in Birmingham. In the community this is not an acceptable thing for a Muslim woman!"

Birmingham

"Schools and community centres need to set up discussion groups for parents to talk about the problems they have with their teenage daughters!"

London

"Some schools portray Islam as very strict. But they don't realise that the strict rules are about culture, not faith. They teach that Muslims are very strict, but that's not true!"

London

"I started wearing hijab about 10 years ago. Now I am going to a new school; if I ask about prayer facilities, they do not know what I need. Even the head teacher doesn't know what Muslims need."

Birmingham

"I did a course in European History at Birmingham University; there was nothing taught about Islam in Spain!"

Birmingham

Curriculum

"The National Curriculum does not allow for diversity or demographics"

Manchester

"We need multi-cultural education."

London

"The RE curriculum gives a very conservative explanation of all the faiths."

London

"The National Curriculum needs to broaden its definition of what it is to be Muslim. At the moment this is usually defined from the men's perspective."

Manchester

I have 2 daughters who went to school here. But they educate children to understand only the strictest form of Islam and they stereotype Muslim women. We have doctors, professional women, women leaders in Muslim countries – this is ignored."

London

"We need to have education in schools about the history of Islam, looking at positive images and role models in Islam."

Bradford

"Education needs to include Black and Arab history – and it needs to be done in the context of anti-racism. You can't de-link racism from Islamophobia."

Manchester

"RE should cover issues of sexuality."

London

"Issues of sexuality, gender, race – all these need to be looked at together in terms of the individual's identity – the Government needs an advisory group to develop new materials for the Curriculum to address all this in an Islamic context."

Manchester

"To teach 3 and 4 year old children sex education is to take their innocence away."

Birmingham

"There is a underground community of lesbian Muslims in Birmingham – married girls, single girls, girls who are about to be married – they need support groups and education about Islam."

Manchester



YOUNG WOMEN

"The Pakistani community needs to learn the importance of education and the National Curriculum. Government need to set up initiatives to address this!"

Birmingham

"The Government need to include issues about diversity in the National Curriculum in schools, colleges and universities."

Birmingham

"My parents drilled it into me: education, education, education. For them there were two types of education, the National Curriculum and Islamic education."

Birmingham

Role of parents

"We need more diversity in school governors. This should be monitored. My local governing body has lots of Asian governors. But when it comes to meetings I'm the only one there – where are the others?! It's a 3-year appointment. It looks great on paper, all these different people on the governing body but they don't turn up."

Birmingham

"Few Muslim parents are school governors – parents don't know that they can influence the schools and teachers!"

Manchester

"We can make an impact as school governors: I am one and the head teacher is very supportive: she went to mosque to talk to them."

Birmingham

"As a Board of Governors, we challenged the teachers' low aspirations for our children. We sacked the old racist Head and we got an excellent new Head. Together we have turned it round and it is now the top school in the country, in terms of benefit – but it is still teaching the same Pakistani kids!"

Birmingham



"Mothers have a really big responsibility; you are moulding and influencing your child. That's why it is important that we are able to instil the true nature of Islam and it's not left to some extremist out there trying to divert our children."

Bradford

"If I'm my child's first teacher then I should know what my deep (faith) is to be able to pass on to them – that's what they will take into the community."

Birmingham

"There is a blueprint for us in Jewish families – their foundation is so strong, the community stays together – Muslim women need to spend more time educating themselves – then they will be able to educate their children."

London

"Parents and other role models need to put in the leg work – the education system alone cannot be blamed for underachievement – we need to accept some responsibility – parents need to give their input and support the teachers!"

Manchester

"Parents need to be more educated to be open with their children."

Bradford

Language Barriers

"We need to educate women in our community. There is a language barrier – they think it's not important for them to give their opinion."

London

"We think we're suffering, it's a hundred times worse for our parents or people who have language problems."

London

"Our mothers have learnt a lot. My mother has taught me more than anyone else yet she doesn't speak English."

London

"My mother came here 40 years ago. Her priority was encouraging her children. She isn't educated and she came from a farming background. She pushed us most to go to Uni and do well. She would love to speak English; it's not that they are lazy, their priorities are different. We British people are lazy when it comes to learning other languages. I know a Gujarati who speaks 7 different languages but not English, and he says he's stupid. No he isn't! If I had a choice about having to concentrate on bringing up my children or learning English, I wouldn't choose English. What David Blunkett said about English being a requirement was a load of twaddle!"

Manchester

"My mother is my role model. Although she was not educated and had no languages skills she encouraged us to achieve and learn, to go to the library and read books. It made me realise you don't have to have language skills to be able to teach your children."

Bradford

"We have a waiting list of 200 for ESOL classes in Redditch, from today we should get professional women to teach ESOL. It's about empowerment, that's one positive suggestion rather than just talking."

Birmingham

"Birmingham has facilities for ESOL and my mum goes."

Birmingham

The Women's Project at Preston Muslim's Forum (PMF)

The women's project at PMF was set up 8 years ago to engage BME women mainly working with the Muslim community but not exclusively, over the years various projects have been developed around local needs of Muslim women. Projects include raising attainment of literacy and numeracy, creating employment opportunities, various creative arts projects. Capacity building projects to help sustain community engagement with local and national organisations including public bodies.

They have also developed a teacher training course for Madrasha tutors (Male & Female) in partnership with Blackburn and Darwin Council and Lancashire county council, The are the only organisation in Preston who have delivered an accredited course in Mosques.

Pendle Women's Forum

Forum set up for all women living and working in Pendle. The majority of women in this area are Muslim. The Forum is a voluntary organisation running a number of projects such as: Lancashire Children's Fund project on female development targeted at women and girls; Disaffected Youth project working with girls who are excluded, IT skills classes, arts and crafts skills classes, diabetes awareness projects and ESOL classes. The Forum also ran a series of successful events for a community cohesion project and hold regular discussion groups for women to discuss their issues in a safe environment.

4.3 Gender roles

Gender roles created much debate and discussion. Women passionately emphasised the need for Muslim men to be educated about women's rights in Islam, as well as women becoming more aware of the rights they have been clearly given in Islam, in order to be able to dispute the inaccurate claims and encroachments of their rights that regularly occur. Women spoke strongly about the wide variety of Islamic beliefs and the way in which that diversity was suppressed, preventing women from claiming their rights. The concept of honour was raised within many contexts, ranging from generational and cultural gaps to the control of women's lives by men and society more generally.

The interpretation and teaching of Islam by imams was also discussed. Some imams were praised for their equality-based approach and understanding, which women felt reflected the true nature of Islam; others however were criticised for failing to provide women with advice and support. Women with marital problems, including domestic violence, reported that they could not approach their imam for help. Some women also felt that where the male community leaders pay the imam's salary, he is unable to support women on issues that are considered to be culturally taboo, for example domestic violence, for fear of losing his job. Women told us that in many mosques it was difficult to get access, whilst some provided no provisions for women and therefore excluded them, for example, in the absence of a separate praying area or Islamic teaching services. Others simply made them feel unwelcome.



Cultural Patriarchy versus Islam

"Our biggest problem is that women are not respected. Our women have more freedom to do things than ever before, but they get no respect from men! It leads to becoming depressed."

Birmingham

"A lot of the bad stuff is nothing to do with religion: it's cultural. The basics of Islam are not to judge others; love and peace, but boys in our society are just given power. The boys at my school tried to stop the Muslim girls wearing skirts! The girls felt intimidated – but the boys felt they had a right to uphold 'Muslim' values – even though they were not related to the girls."

London

"We give far more importance to culture than what the religion actually says!"

Leicester

"People will educate their sons and not their daughters."

Birmingham

"There are Muslim boys who think women shouldn't work."

London

"You go to meetings full of men and they start saying things like, 'what are women doing here?'"

Birmingham

"When a woman is confident, she's labelled as too modern!"

Birmingham

"My daughter is 13 – my son is younger. But even now my husband allows him to tell my daughter what to do."

London

"Men in all societies may control women, however they don't use religion as a justification, the way it is wrongly used by Muslim men within the community."

Manchester

"It's about traditions and not Islam."

Birmingham

"I do feel it's like men against women; but that's not the way it is in Islam, we are all one. There are equal rights in Islam."

London

"Men need to be educated Islamically. Cultural values need to come down and Islamic values have to come up."

Birmingham

"I think that women need to be educated [about Islam] but the men need to be educated as well."

Manchester

"It's that knowledge that gives you the power to articulate or challenge those kind of barriers or views that are not actually accurate and are embedded within cultural norms."

Manchester

"I was told women were not allowed to speak on Leicester Radio Ramadan – how dare they exclude 50% of the population in this way! I contacted the people that issued the licence about this and they said they only give the licence; it's not their decision about who is allowed on. Every time a woman called the station they would take her off air. Their opinion was taken and then filtered through a man!"

Leicester

"We need to work with the other half of the community – men! We have supported their projects for years – it is time they supported us."

Birmingham

"No, we don't give up, if society is going to move forward, we can't give up, and it is moving forward."

Birmingham



"It's about social conditioning and the way women are brought up. They are brought up to think they are the daughters, the mothers and the wives, so when you ask them what **they** want, it's all about their children and family, not them. Saying that, I've come across women who want to stay at home and look after their children and people are asking them: why aren't you going out, and doing this or that, and they are saying: no, I want to do this. It's about having that freedom of choice; because I do think that women who stay at home are under-valued in society, whereas in Islam for women who are mothers, it's a very respectable role to be in, it has such a high status. It's only in **this** country that it's down played."

Manchester

"Muslim women often hide behind culture. Islam was the first religion to give women equality. It's women's responsibility to find out what those rights are. From the Prophet's (peace be upon Him) time, there were such strong women and role models. We've let ourselves down. The great women in Islam overcame barriers and that can only happen with education, awareness and empowerment [about Islam]."

Manchester

"Yes we've got barriers in the way, but we've got to have self belief which comes from education and knowing your rights."

Manchester

"I'm not a mother and not a wife; that, in society makes me a complete failure."

Manchester

YOUNG WOMEN

"Women in my family weren't subservient, but the community expected us to be. I didn't marry someone from the community and this didn't go down well at all – now, both my family and the community are very supportive."

Birmingham

"Our parents were the trailblazers, they tried to reconcile cultures. They used the religion stick to make you feel guilty – they owned us – and often said, "If you don't do xxx you're not a proper Muslim."

Birmingham

Interpretations and Understanding of Islam

"You come back from school and you go to the mosque. You're taught about Islam. When I go to the mosque I have to take their word for it! You read the Quran in Arabic – that doesn't give you the same understanding as if it were in English. We need to be able to discuss it, learn from scholars, and be able to question what I am told."

Manchester

"We have the Quran and we have the Hadiths – some people accept these as gospel – but sometimes they contradict each other. We need to educate them about these disputes – and what is based on culture and what on Islam."

Manchester

"There is a variety of understandings of Islam and no one is more right than the other. Islam from the fourteenth century is based on the diversity of Muslims and should remain so."

Birmingham

"Women's rights are well advanced in many Islamic countries. We need to publicise that. Muslim countries are not third world countries!"

Manchester

"We need more information about the Islamic perspectives on issues such as domestic violence and depression. We need to know about the progressive aspects of Islam. Islam doesn't necessarily suggest only one thing. I would be very interested in progressive interpretation on women and women's rights."

Birmingham

"I would like to know more about the rights of women."

Birmingham

"But it's not just knowing about the rights, but accessing those rights in the community practically."

Birmingham

"A gentleman said to me: my wife stays at home, what are you doing here? We get lectured by Muslim men!"

London

"Many families don't allow women to go out."

Birmingham

"There's more pressure on women in the house. If your child does something wrong it's the woman's responsibility, like she brought them up wrong. It's like a woman's committed a sin by giving birth!"

Birmingham

"Women have their husbands telling them off and their in-laws and on top of it their children don't listen to them—there's so much pressure and it affects you mentally."

Birmingham

"I have four sons. I want my children to marry who they want but my father-in-law is insisting on dictating who they should marry. Should I listen to my son or father-in-law? My father-in-law is in hospital and says he's dying because my son won't listen to him. Everyone blames me as the mother!"

(In response:) "It's your child's life – your father-in-law has lived his life!"

Birmingham

"I used to be a volunteer with Victim Support in Lincoln. A Bangla lady had to take her 6-year-old son to interpret with the GP – about her illness. She was kicked out of her home by her mother-in-law for producing just girls. Her brother wouldn't let me in her house to advise her, because I work in mixed sex group."

Leicester

"Generation and culture gap is an issue—your parents bring their culture into British culture and sometimes expect you not to be around the opposite sex. They have to understand that you have to work, study, and live in this society with the opposite sex. Parents see this society as being more free compared to the societies they came from. They have to understand, we need to be more independent."

London

"Helping non-Muslims to understand Islam will reduce racism. We need to educate children to know what Islam is about. We need a wide variety of materials – currently everything's dominated by the conservative view of Islam."

Manchester

"I used to hate the word 'kaffir' (non-Muslim) – everything that goes wrong is down to non-Muslims. We need to look at ourselves – and improve. We must respect other religions. This would help kids be better human beings."

London

"In our religion, we're not allowed to judge people. I find it strange that we are judged, as Muslim lesbians."

London

"On gay issues, on Islam – each of us has the right to look at the Quran ourselves and interpret it ourselves."

London

"The Muslim community needs to recognise its own diversity and acknowledge its minority groups – otherwise we will fracture as a community."

Manchester

"At a local level we can be confident about Islam but we don't know what others are doing."

Birmingham

YOUNG WOMEN

"Being in this secular country and being a religious person is hard, especially when your friends are not religious. It's not in my agenda to convert people or preach to them. Because I come from a religious background it does not give me the right to impose that on anyone. The way I see it is, we should accept people for who they are. – we should celebrate humanity!"

Birmingham

"Most people I know have a very narrow view of Islam. We have a very active Muslim Society in Warwick Uni, but men and women are segregated, which I think is ridiculous! It's ok for us to mix with non-Muslim men, go to Uni with them, and work with them, then why not with Muslim men?! Our parents want us to meet good Muslim boys—how can we do that when we aren't allowed to mix?"

Leicester



Imams

"We need more women scholars of Islam."

London

"We have one women imam in the UK. It's hard for women to do 5 years' training – especially with no help for tuition fees."

London

"The men in mosques are not going to tell anyone about women's rights under Islam! I had to go and get a book on Islam in English, to learn about my own religion!"

Birmingham

"It seems any man who can speak a little bit of Arabic thinks he can make up laws, and women think it must be right as he speaks Arabic."

London

"Imams can't give advice to daughter-in-laws because if the mother-in-law and father-in-law find out they will tell the imam off. For example, if my father-in-law is the treasurer of the mosque then he is the big man there. Nobody in the mosque would help me. When I came here I went to the mosque to get Islamic advice and I told them the situation. The imam told me if you are 100% sure your husband has a girlfriend you must leave him, as he only wants a slave for his parents. We can't always talk to male priests; we want some ladies we can talk to in the mosque as well. Would like to have a woman who can advise on those matters. I want confidentiality and in our culture there's no confidentiality."

London

Mosques

"We need to keep government out of the mosque – they need to be completely separate."

Birmingham

"Why aren't we doing something about mosques? They're the first point of contact for most Muslims."

Birmingham

"If khuthbahs in the mosque were made on the issues of women's rights, it would have an effect on the men who go there."

Birmingham

"When we did a survey of how many women were trustees on mosques committees, it was less than 2%."

Leicester

"We need to be radical enough to go on board with mosques."

Birmingham

"We need women's interpretation of Islam, not just men's!"

London

"Why don't we use mosques? Some have community centres but they're not all accessible."

Birmingham

"Why don't we do something positive? Don't be whiney and be more positive. We are in a strong position, one mosque might not be accessible but another one might. Ask and you will get – possibly!"

Birmingham

"There was no access for women to our local mosque. We started a petition and got 150 women to sign it and that got us access."

Birmingham

"There were no women going to our local mosque. We approached the mosque and the man there said, if women came and asked for access, they'd create access. It's that simple sometimes, ask – if there is demand in the local community then facilities can open up. Go to the imam, get women to sign a petition, they will do it, perseverance required!"

Birmingham

We need to be logical, reasonable and practical. Parents realise their children and young people need Islam in their life. My dad's a committee member and he's encouraging. I couldn't go to Taravia (extended evening prayers during month of Ramadan) as no other women were there; I don't think it's as simple as men just stopping us from going."

Birmingham

"Where is the female representation in all the different mosques/groups etc, who do we go to?"

Birmingham

"At the Leicester mosque, women donated money to build it but then were not allowed in!"

Birmingham

"But, how many women actually turn up [to mosques]? I'll do opposite of what I'm told. I know the choice is there but will I actually use it? No."

Birmingham

"The Central Mosque in Birmingham is always busy, but that's different. Generally speaking if it's easier for women to pray at home they will, but might go to mosque for Jumma. Also different communities have different religious levels and sensibilities."

Birmingham

"How equipped are local mosques in working with women?"

Birmingham

"Why aren't mosques working with women? And why is today the first time I have seen a Muslim woman chaplain?"

Birmingham

"I called about Eid prayer which was going to be held in the park. The brother was like, 'Oh sister you can't come, this is the first time we are doing this'. I said, well, this is my Islamic right and I'm turning up! In the end we got a tiny corner of the tent, where the speakers didn't work properly."

Leicester

"Some men might be scared but we've got to start somewhere, and start getting involved within the mosques."

Birmingham

"In France women advise in the mosques, here it only happens in Central Mosque in Birmingham and Regent's Park Mosque in London, what about all the other mosques?"

Birmingham

"Mosques are not just for praying."

Birmingham

"Mosques should have a more active role in the community, how many mosque groups are helping Muslim women and children?"

Birmingham

"Mosques need to take a more proactive role in engaging members of society."

Birmingham

"Last year my mosque had iftar (breaking of the fast) for non Muslims. We need more things like this to reach out to the wider community."

Birmingham

"There is no mosque in Solihull, however the relationship with the police is quite good, but there are no facilities for Muslims. We have to tackle the councils on these issues as well."

Birmingham

"I know a Catholic teacher who admires Muslim communities and how it draws in its youth. We think mosques don't do anything for us but from a different viewpoint I could see how it appears to others."

Birmingham

"Church attendance is down, but mosque attendance is up, but mosques are still burying their heads about social issues like drugs, youth issues, youth work etc."

Birmingham

"The kids going to the mosques aren't the kids that need help and reaching."

Birmingham



Services for Women in Mosques

"I know a woman who went to her mosque to get advice about a divorce, but they refused her and told her just to stay with her husband. We need more women – it is dominated by men!"

London

"I took my children to the Peckham Mosque – didn't know how to approach the imam. He offered to come to my home to help me in teaching the children. But when he came, he wanted to speak to my husband – he wouldn't talk to me. When I explained, I didn't have a husband – he wanted to help patch up my marriage! I didn't want a reconciliation!"

London

Markfield Institute of Higher Education (MIHE)

Markfield Institute of Higher Education offers postgraduate degrees courses in Islamic Studies, Muslim Community Studies and Islamic Banking, Finance and Management allowing students a unique opportunity within the British higher education system to learn the challenges faced by the Muslim community and humanity in general. Subjects such as Management of Mosques, Trusts and Endowments; Gender Issues and Family Life; Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care; Islam and Pluralism are taught alongside Islamic History; Life of the Prophet; Islamic Sources: Qur'an and Sunnah. Currently 20% of our students are female and come from UK and a number of overseas countries studying across all of our taught courses.

Training of Muslim Chaplains course

Muslims are part of British society and like other sections of the community they are also affected by economic, religious and social problems. This led to the development of a specific course to train Muslim professionals to work in the areas of chaplaincy and pastoral care which is urgently required. MIHE have stressed the need for Muslim women to become involved in this course to ensure that the community needs can be met and proactively advertised within the Womens' groups and associations. It includes sessions on Chaplaincy from an Interfaith perspective (Christianity, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist), it also focuses on Islamic Counselling skills. The sessions are undertaken by experienced chaplains from Muslim faith and other faiths. Over the last four years, 22 Muslim women have undertaken this course and completed their placements in the following sectors:

Diploma in Islamic Jurisprudence

The Muslim community has been experiencing fundamental social changes, especially in relation to the structure of the family. In view of the demand from the Muslim community, the MIHE developed the Diploma in Islamic Jurisprudence which dealt with Islamic Family Law and the Law of Inheritance. The Family Law course consisted of Engagement (nikah), marriage, dowry (mehr), guardianship, adoption, the types of divorce (talaq, Faskh and khula'), parentage, paternity tests, surrogate motherhood, child access from the Islamic and British Legal system and maintenance. The Law of Inheritance course consisted of calculating shares, the British Legal system, drafting wills, tax planning. Since 2005, 9 Muslim women have undertaken the course. The Muslim women were from varied professional and cultural backgrounds and have greatly benefited from the course and knowing their Islamic rights, partner's rights, and children's rights.

Section 5

ENCOURAGING CIVIC PARTICIPATION

There were a variety of issues Muslim women said they faced when accessing public services. These ranged from the need to have women-friendly services to lack of funding made available to women's organisations, and Muslim women's organisations in particular. Women gave many examples of services that they were unable to access, including refuges and care homes for elderly people because their faith needs would not be met. Conversely, although women wanted faith-sensitive services, they wanted to be sure that services would be available to them from non-faith sources as well. For example, it would be hard to access abortion advice from an Islamic health centre. Health services were criticised for being insensitive and there was repeated concern that GPs from within the community could not be trusted to maintain patient confidentiality. Women reported not being able to talk to them about domestic violence, or to come out to them as lesbians because they feared GPs would pass information on to patients' families. Some mothers also expressed concerns about social services and great anxiety that social workers would not support their efforts to discipline their children within the law but also within cultural and faith norms. In particular women were anxious that their teenage children might be advised by social services to ignore the curfew their parents had laid down.

"The best way to improve services is to see how they are working – by asking the community how they can be made better."

London

"All these statistics are kept now. It takes up so much time, but what effect does this have on the quality of service we give? It's just for them to tick off their boxes."

London

Safe space for women

"Not enough room is given to Muslim women to express their views."

Manchester

"More meetings like this are important for women to be able to talk and gain confidence."

Birmingham

"I personally feel that lots of women are doing really good work but networking between women is really bad, we need to join forces and spread the word; the WNC, will it do that?"

Birmingham

"I back that, (above) I don't know what everyone else is doing, we don't know what the national direction is after 9/11; the space created for women, we're only now beginning to realise."

Birmingham

"I want to talk to people openly about terrorism. But if I say, I can understand why it happens, people accuse me of being a terrorist myself!"

Manchester

"Since 9/11 space for women should be created"

Birmingham

"Post 9/11 there is a space to be filled for Muslim women to express their views and to participate."

Birmingham

"We need a forum where a variety of views on Islam can be expressed."

Manchester

"We need a place where women can go for support. We need centres to give women advice and support."

Leicester

"We need a forum where all can express their views, we need to find places where it's comfortable to go. Everyone has a view when they feel comfortable."

Birmingham



“Women need to express their needs and spread the word, but how to address the apathy and the lack of motivation?”

Birmingham

Building the community

“There’s a lack of funding for women’s organisations, especially around networking the community. From my own experience, there’s so much bureaucracy to go through to get funds – more funding, and more accessible funding, would help.”

Manchester

“No-one is encouraging women to get active in the community – to come out and volunteer. We need opportunities to do this that are sensitive to our roles and responsibilities as Islamic women.”

Manchester

“Networking between Muslim Women groups could be improved.”

Birmingham

“We need to fund some Muslim organisations that are not led by Imams. Too often, it’s the men who shout loudest, who are heard. But the men don’t represent the whole community.”

London

I also run women’s groups, particularly for Muslim women because, I hate to say the word they are disadvantaged and disadvantaged within the mainstream. There is a lot of potential but we do need a lot of help from people up there with finances.”

Leicester

“The Leeds New Muslim project gives help and support to new converts. Because we are a Muslim organisation the doors to funding are immediately closed even though we provide education help and support. The perception is that any Muslim-led organisation will brainwash!”

Bradford

“When resources are scarce there is competition and competition is cruel.”

Bradford

“Government should put money into the Muslim women’s agenda. When you look at, say, issues around sexuality there has to be a faith element as it’s the two that are normally in conflict within a person having to deal with it.”

Bradford

“Government needs to have a system which allows community centres to co-operate more.”

Birmingham

“If you want to help Muslim women, you can’t have as a clause that faith can’t be funded.”

Birmingham

“All these contacts made today, there shouldn’t just be a report, there needs to be more, we should establish links. People, go back and feed things back into your community.”

Birmingham

“Networking especially needed after 9/11, this (today) is like a godsend to me, don’t lose all this. We need all the contacts, stay in touch.”

Birmingham

“Women traditionally are not in the public sphere, we have to go out, do outreach work, see what everyone else doing, then feedback and network—it isn’t easy, just acknowledge that but we still have to do it. Will the WNC create a network? This will help us.”

Birmingham

“Strengthen the Muslim Women’s Network; disseminate stuff and swap contacts from today within the network.”

Birmingham

“Need methods of reaching people who don’t use email or read newsletters etc.”

Birmingham

“Women at home have no access to services; they should have access to websites in different languages.”

Birmingham

“Parents desperately want girls to mix with the right crowd, parents will pay subs for youth clubs. Money’s not the problem, it’s their relationship with the staff that’s the issue.”

Birmingham

“Kids have no space, we need to provide this and build links for the future now.”

Birmingham

“In terms of all economic indicators out there, Muslim communities are at the bottom in terms of employment, education etc, and that leads communities to have a lack of confidence. It’s about identifying young people and bringing them forward.”

Bradford

“Within the council’s Equality Unit, Birmingham Council leadership take a stand on faith, but is that the same around the country?”

Birmingham

“Coming here and seeing and meeting other women has given me more confidence, that’s a big achievement in itself.”

Birmingham

YOUNG WOMEN

“There should be more funding for youth clubs and youth centres. This would provide Muslim youth with role models.”

London

“A lot of youngsters think they can only go to the pub – it’s the hub of social life. We need places where there is no alcohol – where you can have a cup of tea! We need space for Muslims to meet.”

London

“Youth workers need to be trained on religious issues. I’ve come across some who are very culturally/ religiously insensitive!”

Birmingham

“What is there for young Muslim girls to do? They’re not included – boys are targeted but not girls.”

Birmingham

FATIMA Women’s Network - Leicester

Communication, capacity and communal space were the three issues that FATIMA have identified as being critical to the support for Muslim women.

- **Infrastructure development:** Setting up a regional Muslim women’s forum across East Midlands which would serve as a pilot for other regions. Funded through Faith in Communities Fund.

A mechanism by which women from the diverse Muslim communities are able to work in partnership and be a focus for capacity building and leadership training. They would also act as positive role models and advocates to engage with govt agencies.

- **Enterprise & International links:** As the only member of the OIC Task Group, outside Asia and Africa, to set up an international Muslim business women’s network, I am hoping this will encourage women entrepreneurs to link from Muslim and non-Muslim countries with Muslims in the UK. Also links with showcasing positive role models. It is critical that Muslim women address the issue of economic activity as levels are particularly low amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani women.

Through partnership work with the RDA we are involved in working with Bangladeshi women as part of the national women’s enterprise pilot projects. Communal Space: Future Builders are funding a feasibility study for a FATIMA one-stop women’s centre to allow women from all communities to engage and learn. Economic empowerment through employment or enterprise is key to the centre’s activities. Private and public funds must be sought to progress this. The model was presented to the OECD last year and recommended to Ministers as part of the Supporting Women in Enterprise in the MENA Region initiative.



Monitoring Service Providers

"The Government needs to ask people how funds are spent, but not just those who run organisations, but also the actual service users."

Birmingham

"We ask Government-funded organisations the right questions but we aren't getting answers. In the end you just give up."

Birmingham

"The Government should start handing out fines for organisations that don't give you answers under the Freedom of Information Act. The problem is that communities don't even know such a thing exists or how to access the system."

Birmingham

"It's not that we need more legislation; the Government needs to provide information about legislation. It's out there but people don't know their rights."

Birmingham

"Local community forums must be evaluated to ensure they are doing useful work."

Birmingham

Health services

"We need special services – especially health services, and mental health services. GPs can't understand Muslim women's problems or provide solutions that are culturally sensitive."

Manchester

"There are a lot of Asian women on anti-depressants because service providers don't understand the culture and prescribe drugs instead."

Manchester

My husband brought a friend home, a psychiatrist who treats transsexuals. He said to me, yes you are a transsexual, but what you are doing is haram and you'll go to hell!"

London



"We came from different countries and different backgrounds. The way women grew up in Pakistan is different from Iraq, but what we share is religion and culture. In England there are a lot of foreigners, it's difficult for them when they visit doctors about depression or something like that. They feel that they [doctors] can't understand them. For example, there was an Asian woman who was telling her doctor about the problems she was having with her husband, the doctor suggested why don't you get a divorce? For a Muslim woman this is very difficult."

Manchester

"If you do tell people, especially your doctor – you tell them, and they use it as blackmail: if you don't have this medication, people will find out."

(woman discussing transgender issues)

London

"As an interpreter I've seen how Muslim women using NHS are looked down upon and pushed aside. You should have the right to have a female doctor – it's often looked at like oh you're fussing and wasting our time. I've seen old women get scared and worried – in their countries they've only ever had female doctors."

London

"When I was younger – I grew up in Essex, a mixed community – there were only a few GPs the young women would go to – because GPs in the community felt able to pass information about your sexuality to their parents."

London

"My GP said she's sick, she needs to be seen to..." **(woman talking about sexuality issues)**

London

"Without interpreters, it's hard for me to ask my patients about their mental health or their sexual health problems. I can't ask them about those things, if their family or their children are interpreting for them. We need more independent, professional interpreters."

Birmingham

"We need more female interpreters – so women don't have to bring their young children into the consulting room to interpret for them." **Muslim GP**

Birmingham

"The Government does not use women's organisations enough as a way of reaching the community. They need a database of women, right across the country, with a list of skills including interpreting."

Birmingham

"We are a small community – every one knows each other. We have to train interpreters about confidentiality."

Birmingham

"Women aren't going to do into detail if they think their confidentiality will be broken."

Birmingham

"Training for the health professionals needs improvement. Homosexuality was de-listed as a medical condition years ago. If doctors come from abroad, they need to be taught that. And taught about confidentiality – they shouldn't be able to 'out' you to your community, but they do."

London

"My GP was Hindu. I found out that my GP went to my father-in-law as he was a travel agent and she wanted a ticket to go to India and she mentioned me. I found out that she might have told him everything. After that I didn't tell her anything. Doctors should be punished for breaking confidence."

[woman experiencing domestic violence who spoke to her GP for advice]

London

"I'm worried about going to see my GP – I don't feel confident to be able to discuss these things with them. I don't want to explain to someone who won't understand."

(woman referring to being transgender)

London

"There are taboo subjects that people can't raise – they cause huge heartache – like abortion. Most families won't discuss it. Women can be very isolated."

Birmingham

"There is no Islamic counselling available on the NHS; you have to go private and people can't afford it. There should be a clinic for Muslim women on the NHS."

Birmingham



"We need a Muslim liaison group; at one NHS Trust I worked at. Muslim staff in the Trust talked to patients and to members of the community about their issues and then brought them to the Advisory Group."

Birmingham

"Muslim women still don't understand what cancer is as it is a relatively new word within our languages for an old disease. Some people put all their trust in God and stop taking health care. Families still don't understand the cancer services available to them, such as palliative care; care for the family and for the patient. Women mainly carry out treatment, unless a senior doctor is involved. Men are not allowed to go on the mobile screening unit and not all women know that.

They rely on their husbands, sons, etc to take them to appointments. Women also think that because they are not sexually active, whether that's a sixty plus women or a young twenty five year old that they don't need screening. A lot of the women can't read so producing lovely glossy literature does not always work!"

Birmingham

"Just overall being culturally sensitive to women's needs would be a major breakthrough – so this would mean training for health professionals in trans-cultural awareness, (an area which I find myself speaking to health professionals about on their training days) and developing better multi agency approaches to meeting the needs of our Black and Asian communities. We need to work with families, more especially the men, as the women are reliant on them to take them to appointments etc. There are a lot of good initiatives in place within Walsall – we have women accompanying women to appointments and telling them what's available. We have come along way as we now have interpreters and community workers, but I question the quality of interpreters and we need some strict guidelines on how they are actually trained and managed."

Birmingham

Integrated Language Service Project Bradford

The NHS and Social Services in Bradford District have made provision for language support needs for many years. The development of language support has grown and expanded in response to various factors such as demographic changes. On a district-wide level there are several interpreting and translation services based in health and social care agencies, and the voluntary and private sector.

Childcare

"I want the Government to make changes to the law relating to childminder registration. I leave my children with people I trust such as my parents and my grandparents. I don't trust someone I don't know. I want grandparents to be included under the childminder registration law. It's not fair because I've been paying taxes for ten years now and haven't benefited from childcare scheme or credits where I can get that money. Why is it that the government wants someone else to look after my child? If they need to check on them fine, why exclude them?"

London

"Childcare needs to be affordable – no point having childcare if all your earnings are spent on that!"

Birmingham

"If you stay at home you should get paid because you're providing a service to the community. In Iran women who stay at home get paid too."

London

"We run a Sure Start Scheme and we have been given borough level funding, which is very positive that they recognise us."

London**YOUNG WOMEN**

"I find that childcare is very limited because I'm a free lance visual artist. More flexible childcare services are needed!"

Birmingham

"Where I live childcare is virtually non-existent. I sent off to my local childcare bureau to get a list of available childcare services – there is a lack of culturally appropriate childcare available. A lot of people turn to family, but if you have no family here what do you do? Could this be a training issue? We need to get more Muslim women trained up. The cost of childcare is like paying a small mortgage!"

Birmingham**Housing**

"In Birmingham Muslims live in the poorest areas and worst housing."

Birmingham

"We did a consultation last year on housing needs. If people are going to move into better areas the Government needs to invest in cultural shops, mosques, temples etc."

Birmingham

"A single female should not be re-housed in isolation – you can't do it. Re-housing policies need to be sensitive to their needs."

Birmingham**Social Services**

"My daughter went to social services and asked for help – to go into a hostel or foster care. She is 15 and she won't listen to me. The social worker is telling these children that they can go out and their parents can't stop them. Social Services came and said they'd take her to a friend's house. 5 hours later they called me. She said the family – the woman is lovely, there is a step-dad. They didn't do any checks on how safe it was. They left my daughter in this house, with a strange man."

London

"How can social services help us, if they don't know our values?"

London

"Social services should get training on Muslim values, so they know how to work with young people and parents even-handedly."

London

"We need to train social workers – make them aware of our values."

London**YOUNG WOMEN**

"Some young girls make false claims to get help from Social Services – social workers need training to understand Muslim values and listen to both parents and young girls. They need to understand what is cultural and what is about faith."

London**Police and legal services**

"On Police attitudes to racist crimes – they went up 600% in Newham in a single year (it's the most culturally diverse borough in the whole of Europe). A few months ago, we were waiting at a bus stop in Camden – someone threw an egg at us from a block of flats. Some other women wearing hijabs had eggs thrown at them too. As we waited we could see they were targeting Muslim women. We rang the police – the operator was really rude – said "how do you know this is racist?" She said, "Well, you'll wait a really long time for us to come." An hour later some British Transport Police came past, and they checked for us – they found out that the operator hadn't even passed on my complaint. I asked for them to listen to the 999 tape. They did – and they said it sounded ok to them! I thought about putting in a formal complaint, but I thought what's the point?"

London

"15 police officers visited our local mosque, they were asked to join in prayers, every single one actually did 2 rakah [prayers], and they all had to do a report on it, this is community building."

Birmingham

"I was told it would cost me £30k to fight my husband for custody of the kids. Where could I get that kind of money? I brought those kids up for 12 years."

London**Cultural and Religiously sensitive services**

"I want to talk about women who want to go out. is there anything out there for them to go to?"

Manchester

"Cultural and accessibility needs must be addressed."

Manchester

"Service providers need to be faith-sensitive. We've all got different cultures, but the religion is what brings us all together. Muslim women are afraid to access services."

Manchester

"In Islamic countries there are non-Muslim toilets and there are special Muslim toilets, with proper washing facilities. We need these here in public buildings."

Manchester

"They often use a male lifeguard at women's swimming sessions, because there are no women lifeguards!"

Birmingham**Specialist needs**

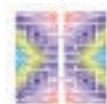
"I work in social services in child protection. There are so many issues within families and communities. Some women need help from domestic violence and we have such a problem finding refuge for them because there's nothing suitable. Sometimes when you contact a refuge they'll say sorry, no, we don't take Arab women; we are an Asian women's refuge – and we have to place them in a mainstream refuge. Women end up having to go back home. We need a lot more preventative services."

Leicester

"Some young Muslims turn to alcohol, to drugs – they just want to fit in. We need good rehab services for them."

London

"We lesbians need an advice line – my sister rang the Muslims Youth-line, but they just avoided the question!"

(woman who called regarding sexuality issues)**London**

“There’s no support in the community for women who are gay; this needs to be mainstreamed. A lot of Muslim organisations are funded by Government and have equality policies, but these are not enforced. We need to know that there are mainstream services that will accept LGBT Muslims. If they get local authority funding, they must cater for LGBT Muslims too.”

Manchester

“In London, there are some groups to support transgender or lesbian Muslims. But there’s nothing in the rest of Britain.”

London

“Family counselling – there should be someone there who understands Muslim culture.”

London

Mile End Park Leisure Centre

Mile End Park Leisure Centre has won a prestigious design award for excellence from the London District Surveyors Association (LDSA).

The £15 million complex, which was opened by sports minister Richard Caborn in February 2006, won the LDSA’s Annual Built In Quality Award, for innovation in providing disability access. Tower Hamlets Council’s building control section nominated the building for the awards.

The pioneering design has incorporated a number of features, such as a moveable screen, which respects the privacy of users, particularly those Muslim women who may have felt excluded from swimming previously because of issues around modesty. The centre was also shortlisted for best public/ community project in the awards.

Amina - The Muslim Women’s Resource Centre (MWRC)

A Scottish charity founded by Muslim women for Muslim women in 1997. Its aim is to promote the welfare and social inclusion of Muslim women. It does this by:

- Working in partnership with mainstream agencies and policy makers to enhance their understanding of the Muslim community and overcome barriers preventing Muslim women accessing services and participating in society.
- Providing confidential faith and culturally sensitive direct helping services and community development to Muslim women.
- Operating all services within a strict code of confidentiality and non-judgementally.
- Tailoring all services to suit the individual needs of Muslim women and to welcome all women
- Offering services in the user’s first language, using interpreters where necessary
- Involving women in an exciting and educative skill building volunteering system
- Bringing Muslim women together with other women in the community through a range of events to break down barriers and stereotypes Bringing together Muslim women and service providers and policy makers to increase mutual understanding The Amina –Muslim Women’s Helpline provides one example of service. It provides confidential information, advice and listening ear service for women from across Scotland. Helpline operators speak a wide variety of languages.



Conclusion

There has been a tendency of late to conflate all Muslims into a homogenous community as if they belonged to a single nation and aspired to a single aim, whereas in fact Muslims the world over have widely differing cultural, national and practical mores. This report challenges this assumption. Muslim women in the UK come from a wide range of backgrounds and have very differing views about life. However, we found a surprising commonality in terms of the experiences of Islamophobia particularly for women wearing the scarf, and/or mohajabehs, who have, in the UK felt the brunt of Islamophobic attacks. Islamophobia makes a wide gap between the Muslim communities’ perception of who they are and the ways in which they are viewed by the host society.

Many of the women who talked to us were covered and thus were taking the decision to publicly identify themselves Muslims at a time when such a label carries the potential fear of making them vulnerable to open hostility. Most of our participants had been verbally and on occasions physically abused themselves – or their friends and family and felt that they were being viewed as the enemy within. Women felt that there is no reason why they could not be good British citizens and Muslim and that their choices should be recognised as valid and respected as such. They were keen to explain that the Islam that they embraced was distinct and different from the artificially stark, gendered religion envisaged by protagonists on both side of the divide.

There was also a clear sense of the ability to contribute considerably more than they have been given the opportunity to do in the past. A combination of Islamophobia, racism and sexism has meant that, in most walks of life, our participants found themselves embattled. But far from seeing themselves as helpless victims of circumstances they came up with many good strategies and examples of good practice. Our participants helped to expand our Network and learn from one another. What is needed now is a more systematic institutional support to enable Muslim women to achieve their considerable potential in this society. The examples of good practice, which are by no means exhaustive, will help us across the country and the Muslim Women’s Network will seek to take the suggestions made by the participants further both in terms of dealing with the Muslim community and in terms of dealing with the political structures of the UK.

Next steps...

The Muslim Women’s Network was set up in 2003 by the Minister for Women, the Right Honourable Patricia Hewitt MP. Since then, it has advised successive Ministers and has extended its numbers and the communities it represents. The Network is open to all women working in the community, and the Report marks a beginning to its work aiming to influence Government policy. The issues raised and solutions proposed in this report will remain on paper without the energy and commitment of the Muslim Women’s Network members and the supporters across the communities. We are confident that together they will generate change.



APPENDIX A

Facilitators' Principles and Values

Facilitators Role

- Safe space
- Comfort zone
- Ensure participation – no-one to dominate
- Ensure voices are heard
- Concentrate on outcomes

Workshop Values

- Confidential (both ways)
- Non-attributed / non-identified
- Inclusive
- Dynamic
- Flexible
- Informal
- Supportive
- Respectful of their views and experiences
- Listening
- Other: what would make the meeting go well?



APPENDIX B

PROTOCOL

Muslim Women's Network and Women's National Commission Listening to Muslim Women

1. Purpose of the consultation

To responsibly record the authentic views of women from the Muslim community and feed this information in to the consequent report.

2. Aims of the consultation

The MWN and WNC will be aiming to gather the women's feedback, whether positive or negative, on the issues raised.

3. Purpose of this protocol

To provide information on what can be expected from the workshops and to ensure those wishing to attend them are not harmed or endangered in any way as a result.

4. Contacting women to attend the consultation workshops

The WNC will use its existing networks of organisations in order to gather the names of women who have voluntarily expressed an interest in attending any of the events. In addition the MWN will use their networks in order to gather names of women who they feel would wish to voluntarily attend any event.

The WNC will hold these names in its office and will not, under any circumstances, share these with any other agency.

Dates of the consultation workshops and where they are being held are included as an attachment to this protocol. If women would like to offer their input but feel they are not able to attend any of the events, they are welcome to provide comments in writing to WNC at 1 Victoria Street, 1st Floor, London SW1H 0ET or email: wnc@dti.gsi.gov.uk

5. Who will be at each consultation event

At each event there will be:

- (approximately) 50 women from the Muslim community and
- three facilitators; three WNC staff members; members of MWN

All of those people listed in the last group are committed and bound by this protocol.

6. Access to the consultation

The WNC will only book venues for the consultation workshops, which are accessible.

7. Recording and storage of material collected at the consultation workshops

In order to accurately reflect women's views, the WNC will need to record the workshops both in writing and in mini disc format. While the WNC will de-identify this material in all reports, there will be ground rules forbidding the use of surnames in order to allow the women to feel more comfortable in sharing their information. It should be noted that the tapes made of proceedings will only be used for the accurate reporting of statements by the women.

Should any of the women in attendance specifically object to this, written recording only will be used.

During the period in which workshops are still being held and until the final report has been produced, all written material and tapes produced from the workshops will be held in a locked filing cabinet in the WNC office. It will not, under any circumstances, be shared with any other agency, nor will it be used for any other purpose than to feed in to the final report. The WNC will retain this information until the Home Office accept the final report. Following this, it will be destroyed.

8. Use we will make of the consultation material

The WNC will be producing a report for the Home Office from each regional event as well as a final report, containing all key issues raised throughout the process. While the women who attend these events will not have the opportunity to comment on each of these before publication (due to the very tight consultation schedule), they will be informed by the facilitators at each event how they can comment on the final report prior to it being presented to the Home Office.

The WNC commit to promoting the contents of the final report amongst Ministers and nominated Civil Service representatives.

Thank you very much for your help!

WNC



APPENDIX C

The Listening to Muslim Women Events

At each event all participants were welcomed to a plenary session by the Chair, Professor Afshar, who explained the agenda for the day and answered questions. At each event one or two women from the Muslim community spoke about their own experiences, after which there were more questions and a space for discussion, both about the aims of the event and about the local issues women faced.

A participative session followed, in which everyone took part in an 'icebreaker' and moved into workshops to look at key issues. Women chose from three workshops: young women; women at home and in the community; and professional women. Participants were able to raise any issues they wished in any of the workshops. After the workshop discussions a plenary session followed where people gave feedback to the whole group on the day's discussions. Recognising that there are always issues that people find hard to talk about openly, one of our facilitators led a game in which participants were asked to stand up if they had a sister; if they liked chocolate, and so on. As the game progressed the questions became more difficult: did they know someone who took drugs, or had been forced into marriage? This session finished with an acknowledgement that some issues were hard to talk about and participants were invited to write down the issues that they would have liked to raise but felt unable to. These are reproduced at the end of this report.

In the same spirit, small separate focus groups were held for women to discuss particularly difficult and hidden issues such as domestic violence and sexuality.



APPENDIX D

Format for the Consultation Workshops

9.00am – 10.00am

Registration and Coffee

10.00am – 10.15am

- Welcome and opening remarks by Chair & Facilitator Chair's address on aims of the day and the MWN

10.15am – 10.35am

- Guest Speaker
- Q & A

10.35am – 11.00am

- Ice-Breaker

11.00am – 12.30pm

- Morning workshops

12.30pm – 1.30pm

- Lunch

1.30pm – 3.00pm

- Afternoon workshops

3.00pm – 3.30pm

- Feedback from workshops

3.45pm

- Closing remarks by Chair



APPENDIX E

Invitation Letter

November 2005

Dear Friend,

What does it mean to be a Muslim woman in the UK? What barriers and struggles do we face in our daily lives? How do we ensure our voices are heard? The Muslim Women's Network was formed in order to try and provide an answer to these and other questions affecting our lives as Muslim women in the UK today. The Muslim Women's Network (MWN) is a fellowship of Muslim women from all walks of life who have come together in order to bring the voice of Muslim women to Government and policy makers. The Network has funding from the Government through the Women's National Commission (WNC) and aims to bring the voice of Muslim women to the forefront. The WNC is the Government's official **independent** advisory body on women.

As part of this broad work, we will be running a series of listening exercises across the UK to hear your concerns. What are the issues that affect you? What would you like to see done about them? No matter who you are, what you do, or what your opinion is, we want to hear from you. We will take your comments and opinions and compile a national report, which will be presented to the Home Office, following all of the events, in summer 2006. Our aim is to talk to a diverse group of women from all Muslim communities and backgrounds.

The Muslim Women's Network and WNC would like to invite you to attend the first of these events on **08 December 2005** at the **Cityside Training and Conference Centre, Black Lion House, 45 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DU** (please see location map attached). You do not have to be a member of any particular group in order to attend. All views will be welcomed and respected.

You can get more information about these events by e-mailing: Shelly.Dowrich@dti.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone on: 020 7215 6985

We would be delighted if you would come and join us so together we can make our voices heard. If you would like to attend the event, we request that you complete and return the attached RSVP form in the stamped address envelope provided by **01 December 2005**, as places might be limited. If you require additional invitation packs for your wider networks, please contact the WNC.

Best wishes,
Anber Raz
Outreach Manager
Women's National Commission



APPENDIX F

Participant Monitoring Questionnaire

Hello

We want to make sure the Government hears the views of all kinds of women – not just those who can easily make their voices heard. We need to be sure we are inviting women from all parts of the diverse Muslim communities to these meetings. It would help us to do this if you would fill this form in, describing yourself.

You do not have to fill this form in if you don't want to, but it will help us greatly. You do not have to give your name on this form.

Name: _____
(please leave blank should you not wish to answer)

Please state the City in which you live: _____

Please indicate your age group:

16-25 25-30 30-40 40-50 50+

Do you have any dependants? Yes No

If yes: Children Other

Please tick the box that most closely describes you.

Please specify your ethnic group:

White:

British
 Irish
Other White (please specify)

Mixed:

White & Black Caribbean
 White & Black African
 White & Asian
Other Mixed (Please specify)

Black or Black British:

Black Caribbean
 Black African
Other (Please describe)

Asian:

British
 Indian
 Pakistani
 Bangladeshi
Other Asian – (please specify)

Chinese or other ethnic group:

Chinese
Other ethnic group (Please specify)

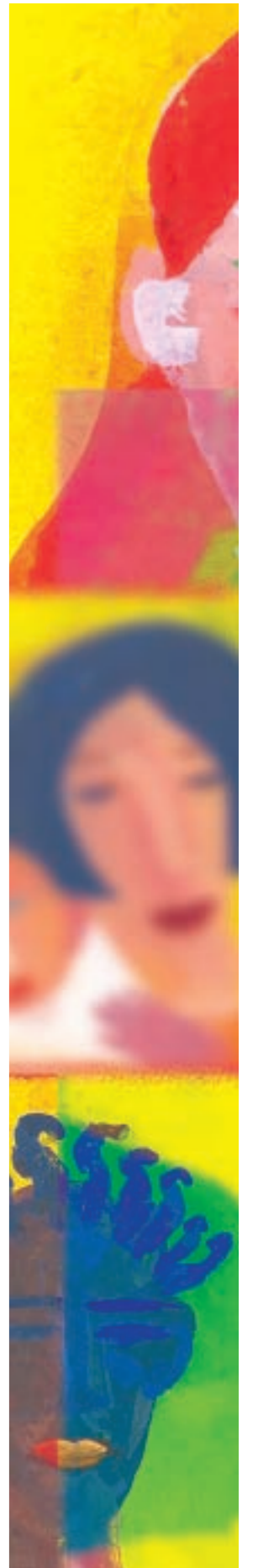
Arab Turkish

Iranian Other

Iraqi

Kurdish

continued on next page





APPENDIX F *continued*

Do you consider yourself to have a disability? Yes No

Do you identify yourself as a lesbian/transsexual/bisexual? Yes No

Please indicate your level of education:

- I have a degree I have no qualification
- I have one or more 'A' levels
- I have a vocational qualification (Please describe)

Are you currently employed? Yes No

- If yes: Full-time Part-time
- If no: Student Housewife Unemployed Retired

- Are you: Self-employed Working in a family business Homeworker

- What is your living situation?
- Council/housing association owned properties
 - Private tenant
 - Homeowner
 - Temporary housing
 - Renting

How many people live in your household?

- 1 2-4 5+

Did you have help to complete this form?

- Yes No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form



APPENDIX G

Participant Monitoring Questionnaire Results

This report is the result of 4 large-scale events and a number of focus groups. This appendix shows data concerning the participants.

Total number of attendees 201
Total number of questionnaire respondents 120

Therefore, these statistics reflect approximately 60% of the total number of attendees.

Participants came from the following locations

Northwest		East Midlands	
Manchester	12	Leicester	4
Oldham	4	Lincoln	2
Blackburn	2	Loughborough	1
Bolton	2	London and the South	
Northeast		London	25
York	1	Middlesex	3
Bradford	4	Essex	3
Rotherham	10	Gloucester	2
Leeds	2		
Huddersfield	1		
West Midlands			
Birmingham	31		
Walsall	1		

Please indicate your age group

16-25	36	40-50	11
25-30	25	50+	14
30-40	31		

Do you have any dependants

Yes – Children	52	No	59
Yes – Other	7		

Please specify your ethnic group

Asian Pakistani	37	Afghanistan	1
Asian British	15	Yemeni	1
Bangladeshi	14	Turkish	1
Asian Indian	11	Mauritian	1
Iraqi Kurd	7	Irish	1
British Pakistani	5	Australian	1
White British	5	Swiss	1
Black African	4	Russian	1
Arab	3		
Persian	3		
Malaysian	2		
Iranian	2		

Do you consider yourself to have a disability

Yes	3
No	115

Do you identify yourself as a lesbian/transsexual/bisexual

Yes	2
No	117

Please indicate your level of education

I have a degree	60
I have one or more 'A' levels	16
I have a vocational qualification	16
GCSEs	2
I have no qualification	8

Are you currently employed

Yes:	Full-time	52
	Part-time	12
Are you:	Homeworker	9
	Self-employed	6
Working in a family business		1
If no:	Student	26
	Unemployed	19
	Housewife	12
	Retired	1

What is your living situation?

Homeowner	53
Council/housing association owned properties	23
Private tenant	18
Living with parents	14
Temporary housing	2
Living with children	1

How many people live in your household?

1	1
between 2-4	53
5+	46

Did you have help to complete this form?

Yes	12
No	94



APPENDIX H

Feedback from Workshop Participants

"Passion, enthusiasm and confidence of peers were inspiring – more events like this please! Ongoing communication would be welcomed!"

"Very good – was really useful and comprehensive"

"Will this make a difference?"

"We hope to see some of the harder issues addressed"

"Inaccessible to many Muslim women, which is a bit disappointing – needs to access more excluded voices!"

"I think we needed more time to really unpick root causes"

"I found it extremely useful and I hope to attend more like this"

"Excellent mix of different groups of Muslim women – well done organisers"

"I expected it to be a bit boring but I was proven wrong as it was much fun – the work you do is FANTASTIC please keep it up!"

"I felt at liberty to discuss any issue knowing it was confidential!"

"It went beyond my expectations – this event was very useful and I hope to attend many other events regarding Muslim women in the future."

"I want to see the outcome and see if we are actually being listened to!"

"This event was very useful, I'm glad I came I hope to attend many other events regarding Muslim women in the future"

"Enjoyed the feedback sessions – was excellent!"

"Everything including subjects was okay, conversations went smoothly."

"Morning session most useful as issues that concerned us!"

"I'm glad I came & said what I felt & believed."

"Session after lunch most useful as it led to solutions of problems for Muslim women, particularly women from different countries and different cultures."

"Very good overall."

"Most useful that everyone coming together and listening to each other. We pray that such meetings continue to provide support to each other"

"If this continues it will be good"

"I can't speak English but you all gave me the opportunity to speak and participate"

"Running of day good, need better time management."

"Morning workshop most useful, knowing you're not alone!"

"Partly met objectives – for the most part. Fatima does a great job, but try to include young professional and non-professional women too! We're the next generation and face different problems to our mothers!"

"Could not speak openly as could not fully understand in English, would be useful if Urdu speaker was present."

"Could discuss issues openly, it would have been better to have smaller groups to encourage quieter members of the group to participate."

"Yes, but perhaps not enough time (but we could go on and on!)"

"I think I was confident enough to talk because I was comfortable"

"Provide CHILDCARE!"

"Smaller groups – easier to speak openly"

"Able to openly air views"

"The group was very open and inclusive. A few members did have language barriers though"

"More time needed as always!"

"Yes, but I hope the women who attend this will benefit from it"

"Yes, but were all members of the community present? i.e. professionals and non-professionals, young and old?"

"Although need to widen your knowledge of Muslim women from Horn of Africa countries"

"It would be lovely if such an event could be held in Rotherham, Muslim women there are usually left out of debates and consultations."

"Excellent discussions and workshops."

"The event was led by a high profile Muslim women, this added to the overall aims."

"We should have these events on a regular basis."

"Very useful. Networking, sense of identity."

"More events are needed"

"It would be interesting if a similar event could be held in Rotherham."

"These events are very very useful, we should have more in various towns and cities."

"Events like this should be more regular and not as a result of 7/7."



APPENDIX I

Breakdown of Muslim Population in the UK

BREAKDOWN MUSLIM POPULATION IN THE UK (National Statistics 2001)

- **Muslims largest religious group after Christians:**
 - 1.6 million Muslims in UK in 2001
 - 3% of Population
 - 52% of non-Christian religious population
- **Youngest age profile of all religious groups in UK:**
 - 34% under 16 in 2001
- **Muslims only religious group in which men outnumber women:**
 - 52% men
 - 48% women
- **Ethnic breakdown:**
 - 74% Asian (1.2 million Asian Muslims in UK 2001):
 - 43% Pakistani
 - 16% Bangladeshi
 - 8% Indian
 - 6% other Asian
 - 11% White:
 - 4% White British
 - 7% Other White (includes: Turkish, Cypriot, Arab & Eastern Europe)
 - 6% Black African origin
- **46% Muslims living in UK born in the UK**
 - 39% born in Asia:
 - 18% Pakistan
 - 9% Bangladesh
 - 3% India
 - 9% born in Africa:
 - 2% Somalia
 - 1% Kenya
 - 4% from other European countries:
 - 3% Turkey
 - 1% former Yugoslavian countries
- **Muslim women and men had highest rates of reported ill health:**
 - 16% of women reported health as 'not good' and 13% men.
- **Muslim households most likely to be living in rented accommodation from council or housing association (28%)**
- **In 2003-2004 31% of Muslims of working age in UK had no qualifications, highest proportion for any religious group.**
- **Muslims born in UK twice as likely to have degrees in 2003-2004 as those born elsewhere.**
- **Unemployment rates for Muslims are higher than those for any other religion:**
 - 15% Muslim women unemployed
 - Muslims aged 16-24 highest unemployment rate:
 - 22% compared with 11% Christian
 - 14% Muslims aged 25-34 likely to be unemployed compared with 4% Christians.
 - 68% of Muslim women of working age economically inactive.
- **Geographic Distribution:**
 - 38% live in London
 - 14% West Midlands
 - 13% North West
 - 12% Yorkshire & Humber



APPENDIX J

Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Eid	'Celebration'- there are two universally recognised celebrations in the Muslim calendar Eid al-Fitr (after Ramadan), and Eid al-Adha.
Hadith	a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)
Halal	permissible under the canon of Islamic jurisprudence
Haram	forbidden under the canon of Islamic jurisprudence
Hijab	veil, usually referring to a garment veiling the hair
Iftar	the ending of a fast at sunset. Muslims generally fast 30 days during the month of Ramadan, as well as other times during the year
Imam	a term usually referring to the prayer leader in congregational prayer, but also to religious personalities
Izzah	honour (pronounced Izzat in Urdu)
Jilbab	a garment or set of garments that covers the body, often in the form of a long coat
Jumma'	Day of congregation/Friday; also refers to the congregational Friday prayer held after midday
Khimar	something that covers, often used to indicate something that covers a part of the head.
Khutbah	Sermon; there are two khutbahs given consecutively during the congregational Friday prayer
Madrasah	a school; used in popular discourse in the UK to refer to supplementary educational institutions where religion is taught.



APPENDIX J

Glossary of terms and abbreviations *continued*

Muhajabah	from the word 'hijab'; someone who is veiled
Niqab	a covering that covers most of the face, except the eyes
Qur'an	'Recitation'; God's revelation to humanity. Holy book of Islam
Rak'ah	represents a unit of the daily canonical prayer.
Ramadan	The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and the month in which Muslims generally fast from dawn to dusk.
Shari'ah	'A path'; usually refers to the legal abstract of Muslim religious life



- rape within families / incest
- sexual abuse
- homosexuality

Sexual harassment in schools, colleges, ^{workplace} and harassment in general

domestic violence is a big issue but women keep it quiet

not allowed to go out of the house for 18 yrs. As I got older things got better

- 1) Fixed sex in marriage
- 2) The question of pro-life and the whole issue of ending a pregnancy
- 3) The effects of domestic violence on children?
- 4) The diff issues of leaving your partner the issues of social + economic?
- 5) The issue of - in-laws in decisions which affect you.

My Palestinian scarf. If I wear it, I'm terrorist. If non-muslims wear it, it's OK.

Abortion
allowed?
not allowed?
in Islam

Pedophilia from the community. & pednet within the community.

Sexual Abuse in mosques. Domestic violence at home. Taboo subjects like homosexuality

Incest - Rape.

Violence against women. Access to social + economic opportunities either due to internal problems + responsibility or external barriers. Lack of appreciation of home-based women's value + contributions

Muslim girls being educated on sex, where sexual acts are permissible in Islam for example many muslim girls have sex but don't know about the rules they take it could be discussed now best to tackle this

- Issues that cannot be discussed.
- sexual abuse.
 - domestic violence.
 - a critique of Western ideologies
 - a critique of ~~Political~~ ^{Political} ~~international~~ ^{international} ~~political~~ ^{political} ~~understanding~~ ^{understanding} of World Muslims.

South Asian Comm. ↓ stigma
Rape + Sexual Abuse - (in my family) - my older brother was abused - we lost a half of family - my father's side + some of my mum's side + some of my mum's problem - wanted to brush under the carpet. ^{SEXUAL ABUSE IS A MAJOR PROBLEM} I was told 'in Islam all sins are made 28 forgiven' - I told them - not in Islam I believe in God as forgiver not me.

Violence in the mosque

Problem of communicating with learners who think they are good but they are not.

SEXUAL ABUSE + HEALTH
INCEST

Sexual Abuse on women by their own relatives. It's a 'hush hush' topic - Fraud upon! It's on the rise. NO ONE TO TURN TO!!

There are many muslim women who are in oppressive and exploitative marriages but who are unaware of the routes available to them in order to get a divorce and end an unhappy marriage. Women if seems that it is almost impossible for women to get a divorce. There needs to be a clear ~~way~~ ^{way} that women can get a divorce, because it seems that men only have the power to divorce.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TO CHILDREN / YOUNG PEOPLE
COERCION TO MARRIAGE
FREQUENT CONTROL OF YES IS +

- Love marriages
- Drugs.
- Sexuality

Incest & the problems of the problems of the family's closing who to believe. Lack of support & awareness.

Homophobia in Muslim Communities.

Global issues affecting the muslim Ummah i.e. War, Prejudice, Lack of leadership.

We, well I, don't mind talking about any issue, if it helps to talk to others then it's all well, a problem shared is a problem halved!!!

People thinking you are a terrorist when you are on the tube. I can't even put my bag between my legs without 10 people looking at me + moving away.

Emotional Blackmail Pressure to get MARRIED ↓ the threat of an independent successful woman + the threat of female, assertive, identity + sexuality.

Being in a relationship with a person who is not of your religion. Secretly asking it. Cannot speak openly for fear of being disowned etc. Having to live a dishonest life only because you have no other alternatives.

SEXUALITY - Muslim gays + lesbians. Can you be both muslim + gay?

* The difficulties of women trying to advance themselves either intellectually or otherwise in the community if how they are curtailed or how men create barriers to much progress while they - the men can do use every tactic/strategy to make the same progress.

* Skillful navigation: it the way men in the Muslim community are able to navigate their way - with the support of other men in the community - through each & every possibility from deserting their wives of families to polygamy - marrying more than one wife etc - navigating their way between Islamic law & British law.

Sexuality

HIV

Rise in prostitution of Muslim Women

people might not welcome me because I stand out.

Challenges to the paternal interpretation of the Quran - there is a continual fear that we don't know enough therefore can't challenge these interpretations, we will be accused of being selective with those aya of surah (which never stops men) and that we will be attacked for doing so - from friends, family of community etc

Female infant ~~side~~ circumcision (!?)

Interest in Abortion

get judged as a stereo typical way. sum ppl think we r 'dumb' or dnt know english I want to be judged as a individual.

CHILD ABUSE

ADVICE ON MIXED MARRIAGES.

Women abuse. Child abuse.

Sexual abuse amongst Muslim families

Child abuse in mosques

Inter-Racial / Inter-cultural Relationships / marriages

women being suppressed by men

sex

abuse

Lack of parental support / abandonment by father.

Narrow Mindsets amongst our "own" Communities.

Women who suffer from Sexual Abuse