



MWRC

Amina

The Muslim Women's Resource Centre

Muslim Women's Voices

Report presenting the findings of a Scotland-wide
Listening exercise conducted with Muslims

Report compiled by

Nadia El-Nakla , Gabrielle Macbeth and Fariha Thomas

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FOREWORD

This report is a product of dialogue with Muslim women across Scotland; it identifies current social needs within the Muslim community. The listening events were designed to be participative, identify key issues regarding local service provision and provide an opportunity for Muslim women's voices to be heard and valued by mainstream service providers.

In 2007 Amina – the Muslim Women's Resource Centre celebrated its 10th Anniversary. Over the past decade we have worked within the Muslim community and with service providers and policy makers in Glasgow, and over the last five years have developed into a national Scottish organisation. Amina MWRC is a responsive and pro-active organisation, which tailors the work it undertakes to meet identified need. To celebrate our anniversary we held this series of listening events across Scotland to help further develop our work. We felt it was important to provide a platform for dialogue with women. Muslim women need an avenue to voice their opinions, experiences and ideas on how to improve community cohesion and local service delivery. The key objectives of the listening exercise was to promote dialogue, help set the direction of work for Amina MWRC, influence mainstream policies, and actively encourage service providers to make readily available culturally and faith sensitive services.

The intention of this report is to raise awareness of the barriers that exist when accessing local services, resulting in strategic recommendations to counteract these difficulties. In addition to socio - economic factors¹ that place the Muslim community among the most deprived on a wide range of indices, including in relation to income, health, education and housing, Muslim women are a particularly vulnerable group in society due to the current social climate of Islamophobia. This has been exacerbated by the perceived threat of Islamic extremism, and furthermore 2005 - 6 saw issues regarding the hijab and niqab (face veil) becoming politicised, leading to some Islamophobes feeling sanctioned to harass visibly Muslim women. As a service provider working to the needs of Muslim women we at Amina MWRC wanted to assess the impact of this intense public scrutiny and negative media attention on grassroots women.

This report highlights some critical issues that need to be tackled within Scotland and will hopefully encourage a proactive approach at multiple levels; from the grassroots to the strategic development of Scottish Government policies. We hope our readers find it useful.

¹ 2001 Census,

Moving on Up? Visible Minority Ethnic Women at Work A summary of the first phase of research fro Scotland Equal Opportunities Commission Scotland 2006 & *Moving On Up The Way Forward*. Report on the investigation into Visible Minority Ethnic Women at Work in Scotland EOC 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is it like being a Muslim woman in Scotland in 2007/08? Has life become more difficult over the past 6 years? Have local services improved? What needs to improve so that Muslim woman can participate in society without compromising their basic beliefs? These were the questions that we wanted to ask Muslim women, to establish what services were being accessed, what was not accessible and what would Muslim woman like to happen in their local area. Many of the findings presented in this report echo those found in other recent reports on the experiences of, and issues faced by, Muslim women in Britain (see Bibliography).

The Muslim women who participated in the events shared with us their own personal experiences of their lives in Scotland. These women, who attended the listening events and completed our questionnaires, were of a wide range of ages, nationalities and backgrounds.

The experiences of Muslim women varied in every area, along with the attitudes and opinions which were unique and different for every individual woman. However all of the issues discussed were interlinked and the barriers to accessing different mainstream services were similar.

In all the workshops in-depth discussions took place around the feeling of being fearful; a fear of the unknown; a fear of being perceived as linked to terrorism; a fear of being judged by society due to negative media; a fear of being targeted and blamed for activities that are anathema to them as Muslim women and to Islam; and a great fear for the future of their children in Britain. The women were eager to tackle this issue and felt that through dialogue with other communities this could be achieved. In all the cities the women were passionate about living in Scotland and wanted to have a positive impact on society.

Women raised issues about the continuing problems of Islamophobia. It became apparent that few incidents were reported, rather women adapted their lives to minimise the likelihood of harassment. The wider purpose of reporting incidents to enable a picture of what is occurring and take appropriate action was not understood. Few women were aware of remote reporting mechanisms which could have overcome some of their fears.

Women experienced a range of barriers to accessing employment, from discrimination to issues such as lack of skills, including for some, English, and confidence and lack of affordable and faith and culturally appropriate childcare. There was a lack of awareness of helping services both in relation to employment access, and more general advice and information. Women asked for more education classes and leisure services geared to meet women only requirements.

Health issues raised included a widespread lack of awareness of Muslim women's needs among health practitioners, issues around maternity care, interpreting, halal meals, lack of resources for undertaking circumcision, and the need for more faith and culturally aware counselling services

RECOMMENDATIONS

Racism & Islamophobia

Recommendations 1:

- All public authorities should recognise the distinction between colour racism and Islamophobia and include this in their monitoring systems in order that they may most effectively tackle this problem.
- Scottish Government should continue work done to combat all forms of racism through national awareness raising campaigns.

Recommendations 2: Public Transport

- Public transport providers should:
 - send a clear message to all staff that tolerance of racist harassment is unacceptable
 - provide awareness training for all staff
 - undertake a zero tolerance publicity campaign on this issue
 - monitor the issue and put in pro-active measures in areas where the issue is regularly highlighted

Recommendations 3: Media

- Government at all levels should use their influence to encourage media to desist from sensationalist and stereotypical reporting.
- Media monitoring bodies should carefully examine media content for bias
- Media organisations should consider the impact that their reporting has on human lives and community relations and desist where this has a negative impact

Promoting Change

Recommendations 4: Schools

- Education authorities and individual schools should examine their curriculum to ensure opportunities are provided to encourage understanding and valuing of diverse traditions and to combat Islamophobia
- Islam, as the second largest religion in Scotland should be included as a core part of the faith teaching curriculum in Scotland
- Opportunities should be developed to enable family inputs to schools on faith traditions
- Muslim organisations should work pro-actively with parents to encourage their involvement in their children's schools

Recommendations 5: Muslim Women

- Mainstream and voluntary sector agencies should tailor their work to harness Muslim women's willingness to engage in society by creating opportunities for engagement between communities.
- Funders should recognise the value of work with single communities as a stepping stone to enable their broader engagement.
- Muslim and minority ethnic organisations should work to encourage women to develop their confidence and become more engaged in wider society.

Recommendations 6: Mosques

- Mosques have an important role in creating better community relations within the local community, through encouraging dialogue e.g. interfaith meetings, seminars and open days.

Recommendations 7: Police

- Promote remote / 3rd party reporting amongst Muslim women. There is a need to raise awareness of the schemes as well as of the importance of reporting such incidents.
- Outreach education to communities on role and methods of Police/Procurator Fiscal – eg seminars between community based organisations such as Amina MWRC and local Police Forces
- More information seminars providing an opportunity for Muslim women and men to raise their concerns about Stop and Search Powers and other powers associated with anti-terrorist legislation

Employment and Education

Recommendations 1: Statistical Monitoring

- Government and employment bodies should monitor employment statistics by faith group as well as ethnicity

Recommendations 2: Childcare

- Scottish government and local authorities should ensure an adequate supply of both affordable, and faith and culturally appropriate childcare.
- Childcare providers should ensure their services meet needs of their local communities and access training for staff to ensure this.

Recommendations 4: Employers Islamic awareness

- Employers should consider providing training on Islam and the customs of Muslims to staff and managers.

Recommendations 5: Recognition of overseas qualifications

- Government and employment organisations should ensure there is wider availability of information about acceptability of overseas qualifications for employers and jobseekers.
- Government, employment and training organisations should promote Information about conversion courses and qualification upgrades.

Recommendations 6: Education, confidence & skills development

- Increased availability of ESOL classes, including classes for women who are already citizens, such as older women, as well as the new combined ESOL/citizenship classes for newer migrants
- Education authorities and Community Learning providers should provide more opportunities for adult learning in a faith and culturally sensitive environment,

- Service providers should ensure that information on the support they offer is made available to Muslim women through targeted marketing, and providing publicity materials in different languages.

Health

Recommendations 1:

- Increased understanding of cultural and faith issues, via staff training for all practitioners' to increase recognition and delivery of patient's needs.

Recommendations 2:

- Outreach to Muslim women via community based services incorporating health professionals, local voluntary organisations and community groups with regard to antenatal and postnatal care along with general health and wellbeing issues.
- Ensure availability of translated materials and interpretation services to ensure that the patient fully understands the medical terms, treatments and support available to them. Family members should not be relied on as this compromises patient confidentiality.

Recommendations 3:

- NHS should increase availability of circumcision services for babies across Scotland

Recommendations 4:

- Suitable halal meals, with a variety of options, should be available in all hospitals in Scotland. Hospital staff should be encouraged to offer patients the halal menu and ensure patients are aware that there are halal options.

Recommendations 5:

- Adequate funding and training to ensure availability of culturally and faith sensitive counselling services including bilingual speakers and interpreters where necessary.

Community Facilities

Recommendations 1: Leisure facilities

- Culture and Leisure services should provide a range of women only leisure classes, at a variety of times which are culturally and faith sensitive i.e. no male presence and windows covered to ensure complete privacy.
- Crèche facilities should be provided to enable women with young children access to facilities.

Recommendations 2: Advice and Information

- Available services should undertake targeted advertising to ensure that women are aware of services available to them.
- Outreach work should be undertaken to community facilities Muslim women already access.

- Mainstream agencies should undertake partnership work with BME organisations.
- Mainstream agencies should provide staff training to raise awareness of cultural and faith issues and equip staff to deal with the needs of Muslim women.
- One stop shops for advice and services would help women deal with confusing bureaucracies
- Befriending/ buddying/ advocacy schemes could help women access services and become more confident in utilising them

Recommendations 3: Mosques and Islamic Organisations

- Mosques should develop their potential as a community resource that binds the diverse Muslim community together.
- Mosques should develop their role as an education centre, a place to seek solace, support, advice and information, as well as a place of worship.
- Mosques should reach out to women and young people, ensuring that their needs are met.
- Mosques and Islamic organisations should acknowledge and address social issues and topics of relevance to Muslim women, men and children i.e. anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, drugs etc.

BEING A MUSLIM WOMAN IN SCOTLAND

How Muslim women feel in Scotland in 2007/2008.

The following quotes represent snapshots of participants' feelings. Many are very positive, recognising Britain's overall tolerance of diversity, but others illustrate how things have changed for Muslims in the UK in recent years. Indeed, Islamophobic and racist attitudes persist.

Some of the issues arising here are covered in more detail in the further sections of this report.

Here is how some of the participants briefly described their feelings:

"I feel part of the community."

"comfortable", "happy", "safe", "strong"
"self conscious", "vulnerable", "isolated", "fearful", "undermined"
"Proud", "wonderful", "I love my region"
"don't belong, it's their country", "Not settled", "concerned"
"stereotyped", "alienated", "devalued"

Many participants welcomed and appreciated that Scotland is a tolerant and multi-cultural country, where they feel free to practise their religion.

"There's more freedom in UK to practice Islam than anywhere else. We've got the mosque and the children celebrate Eid in the nursery. There's more tolerance." [Lanarkshire]

"Scotland is very tolerant and multi-cultural" [Stirling]

"In Scotland we have a lot of freedom compared to so many other countries in the world" [Edinburgh]

However, other participants highlighted how Muslims in Scotland face many challenges, notably Islamophobic attitudes, which have arisen since the 11th September 2001 terrorist attacks. The 2007 Glasgow attack appears to have reinforced feelings of insecurity and unease amongst Muslim women who fear for their safety and what this holds for the future.

"I feel everything has changed since the 9/11 events." [Glasgow]

"There are many challenges and it comes from different areas like race, law, certain laws changing like anti terrorism act." [Edinburgh]

"I am from Aberdeen born and bred, and I was told to go back to my own country!" [Aberdeen]

"When I passed by a guy in town he made a 'bomb' sound. He had a child with him."
[Aberdeen]

"Non-Muslims are more judgmental since the Glasgow airport attack" [Glasgow]

"There is more racism" [Glasgow]

"It is different to integrate because of recent attacks; it is difficult for women who wear hijab to move in this society independently" [Renfrewshire]

"I feel not settled, after what happened in Glasgow airport, not secure. The debate is how will it be for our children?" [Glasgow]

"I feel vulnerable. There are a lot of people who do not understand Islam, especially women in Islam" [Edinburgh]

"Last year one of my sons wanted to go to Pakistan. They go regularly to the mosque. You know if they get a stamp in their passport...they are totally Scottish...but since 7th July I have had such fear for my children...my children have respect for everyone...until my children are home I worry." [Glasgow]

"I feel ok but I feel that women who wear hijab face more discrimination" [Glasgow]

"Muslims do not get taken seriously" [Glasgow] *"I feel like a second-class citizen"* [Dundee]

It is important to point out that some participants felt that it has got easier for them to be a Muslim woman in Scotland, although this was a minority view:

"It's not as hard as it used to be" [Aberdeen] *"Things have improved"* [Dundee]

"It's easier than ever before because we have more knowledge of each other" [Lanarkshire]

Some women pointed out how experiences differ from person to person depending on area, age or other factors. The area women live in has a clear impact on how they experience day to day life in Scotland, and this impacts on how they feel, and ultimately modifies their behaviour:

"There is a real difference between town life and city life: in town people know each other and they are comfortable with each other. But in city people are isolated because they do not interact with each other" [Dundee]

"I've just moved from the east end of Glasgow to the south side. I never wore hijab before because I was the only Muslim woman around. I feel safe to do so here" [Glasgow]

Whether or not Muslims are numerous in participant's neighbourhoods can have a bearing on how Muslim women feel:

"I have found it very hard [being a Muslim woman in Scotland]. I have a child in primary 1 and we are a minority in the school. The parents don't approach me; I always have to go to them"
[Edinburgh]

"They put families into bad areas which make us more of a target because we are Asian and this causes more issues and the children end up getting into trouble" [Dundee]

However some participants had very positive experiences to share:

"My situation is the opposite. In the area I live the neighbours are very nice. After the bombing in Glasgow, I felt very bad. I spoke to the headmistress at my child's school, but she said I did not have to feel guilty." [Edinburgh]

Others identified how personal circumstances affect how Muslim women feel in Scotland:

"I think it depends on what stage of life you are at. I was looking for jobs and it was quite challenging in getting a job." [Edinburgh]

"I can feel quite limited in Scotland. I come from London and the two cities are very different. In London you have a lot more. In terms of functions and events there is a lot more going on in London and very little in Edinburgh." [Edinburgh]

Language barriers make it harder to feel part of wider society:

"Elderly ladies find it hard to communicate outside because of the language barrier" [Renfrewshire]

Many women regard Scotland as a more tolerant and safe place than England:

"I feel a lot less vulnerable here [than in London] in terms of peoples attitudes" [Edinburgh]

"It's better than women living in England" [Glasgow]

However not all participants felt the same way:

"I think there is an awful lot of prejudice in Scotland and I have spent a lot of time and lived in London for a long time and its funny that you say you feel less vulnerable here. I still spent a lot of time in London and I feel less comfortable here." [Edinburgh]

Some participants identified the link between employment and wider integration in society:

"If you are working you feel more confident and this makes you more approachable. But if you're not used to going out and about then you feel more shy, not wanting to communicate with people" [Renfrewshire]

Commentary:

This section has highlighted the multitude of Muslim women's experiences and voices. It is encouraging to hear that many participants are proud to be Scottish and feel comfortable being a Muslim woman in Scotland; this reflects the success of many of the existing policies aimed at fostering a society tolerant and understanding of different faiths. However, many Muslim women are still affected by Islamophobic attitudes, and are especially concerned by the climate brought about by the terrorist attacks of September 11th.

RACISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

In 2005, we reported in the Muslim Women Talk Scotland findings² that Muslim women were experiencing increased harassment since the London bombings of 7th July 2005. Through our ongoing development and advice work women have indicated they experienced a rise in Islamophobia in general since the events of September 11th 2001, the Iraq war and the London bombings.

At our listening events the Glasgow attack was cited as exacerbating the problem, although not to the extent that the September 11th or London bombings had. The official response after the Glasgow attack had helped provide reassurance.

“Society looks differently at Muslims after 9/11” [Glasgow]

“Since the Glasgow airport attack women who wear hijab are treated suspiciously” [Renfrewshire]

“The political leader’s response at both Scottish and Westminster levels after the Glasgow attack clearly distinguished between terrorists as misguided criminals and the Muslim community in general. This lead was followed by much of the media leading to far more sympathetic reporting than previously, which I feel reduced the backlash against our community” [Glasgow respondent]

Islamophobia as a distinct form of Racism.

Muslim women clearly differentiate between colour racism and Islamophobia. Indeed women feel that their “Muslim appearance” is responsible for abuse and discrimination, not the colour of their skin. It is clear that in 2008 many women still feel that they are a target for harassment because they are Muslim, especially if they wear the headscarf or face veil, which appears to make them more vulnerable to abuse.

“I feel like I have to make extra effort just to feel safe when I am out in public. There is so much discrimination faced by Muslim women.” [Glasgow]

“Basically when they see the hijab, they know you are Muslim. Two girls attacked me in the town centre. It was in the evening. I am strong, but this girl just grabbed my hijab, she came towards me in a crowd. I snatched my bag and ran.” [Glasgow]

“Sometimes it feels that if wear hijab, you become more visible and people look at you more.” [Aberdeen]

Recommendations 1:

- **All public authorities should recognise the distinction between colour racism and Islamophobia and include this in their monitoring systems in order that they may most effectively tackle this problem.**
- **Scottish Government should continue work done to combat all forms of racism through national awareness raising campaigns.**

² Muslim Women Talk, Experiences of Muslim women in Scotland since the London Bombings, Amina-the Muslim Women’s Resource Centre, 2005.

Public transport

Many of women's experiences of racism and Islamophobia had occurred on public transport, especially buses. The abuse came from other passengers as well as from bus drivers. Women sometimes felt they were discriminated against by bus drivers because of their skin colour or the fact that they wear a headscarf:

"I feel everything has changed since the 9/11 events. I have experienced differing attitudes by people, especially while using public transport." [Glasgow]

"On public transport people feel they can be rude to me. They don't think I can speak English" [Edinburgh]

"Public transport is religiously insensitive, people can be rude" [Stirling]

"I have had a few problems. I didn't extend my hand so the bus never stopped, but I think if I was someone else it may have." [Aberdeen]

Recommendations 2:

- **Public transport providers should:**
 - **send a clear message to all staff that tolerance of racist harassment is unacceptable**
 - **provide awareness training for all staff**
 - **undertake a zero tolerance publicity campaign on this issue**
 - **monitor the issue and put in pro-active measures in areas where the issue is regularly highlighted**

Media impact

Women particularly blamed the media for the roles they play in negatively portraying Muslim women and Islam. This echoes the findings of other listening exercises in UK such as *Muslim Women Talk*, and the Women's National Commission / Muslim Women's Network *She Who Disputes*³.

Women's comments included:

"What people think about women [is] because what they are reading and hearing from newspaper and radio" [Edinburgh]

"Media coverage is negative towards Muslims" [Renfrewshire]

"The negativity in the media is misleading people" [Dundee]

"The media, if you read something like the Evening Standard, it's very Islamophobic" [Edinburgh]

"As people listen to the media, I think the majority of them have a bad opinion in their minds about Islam." [Aberdeen]

³ She Who Disputes Muslim Women Shape the Debate Muslim Women's Network /Women's National Commission 2006

Some women commented that the media can and do play an important role in creating awareness of Islam and Muslims.

"The mainstream services are aware now about Ramadan time" [Glasgow]

Recommendations 3:

- **Government at all levels should use their influence to encourage media to desist from sensationalist and stereotypical reporting.**
- **Media monitoring bodies should carefully examine media content for bias**
- **Media organisations should consider the impact that their reporting has on human lives and community relations and desist where this has a negative impact**

Promoting Change

Role of schools:

Many participants were looking to schools to educate the new generations about Islam in a bid to promote tolerance and understanding:

"Because my children are a minority it is hard. I have asked the head mistress if an outside agency can come in and discuss issues about Islam, but she has not really been interested." [Edinburgh]

"It would be good for community relations to celebrate events together, like Eid and Christmas, maybe in schools so kids can understand" [Renfrewshire]

"Sometimes the information is lacking in schools. It should be "I respect your religion, you respect mine" [Lanarkshire]

"I would encourage all mothers that if they know that their school is teaching Religious and Moral Education to go in and get involved with that because that is one way of educating the community about Islam and getting rid of all those misconceptions." [Edinburgh]

"Need to start educating at Primary school level". [Aberdeen]

"Schools could do more to educate about Islam, tolerance and respect not only in Primary but in Secondary too" [Dundee]

Many participants did highlight how schools were playing an important role in educating the new generations about different faiths, and how this was having a positive impact on society as a whole:

"In the schools, the teachers have been very good, very communicative" [Lanarkshire]

"Schools are more knowledgeable about religion than they were 10 years ago." [Aberdeen]

Despite existing Scotland-wide policies it seems that the picture across Scotland is variable, and in many areas parents feel that schools are not educating children to live in a multi-faith,

multicultural society. This has an impact on community relations in general, and on minority children in the system, who do not feel their traditions are valued, and can become undermined in their self identity.

Recommendations 4:

- **Education authorities and individual schools should examine their curriculum to ensure opportunities are provided to encourage understanding and valuing of diverse traditions and to combat Islamophobia**
- **Islam, as the second largest religion in Scotland should be included as a core part of the faith teaching curriculum in Scotland**
- **Opportunities should be developed to enable family inputs to schools on faith traditions**
- **Muslim organisations should work pro-actively with parents to encourage their involvement in their children's schools**

Muslim women

The women participants felt strongly that they must play a role in diffusing the misconceptions and negative portrayals of Muslims which lead to Islamophobia. While this was sometimes resented, women were also willing to take this responsibility on:

"They [Muslim women] have to make such an effort to bring down barriers that other people put up." [Glasgow]

"A lot of Scottish people are afraid to ask about being Muslim in case they offend us" [Edinburgh]

"It's good to talk to our non-Muslim neighbours" [Renfrewshire]

"My neighbours did not even know what a Muslim was. I have been trying to educate on what a Muslim is, I have given them books about it and have been hospitable to them." [Glasgow]

"We need to hold events to provide information. We have to go to churches and meet other people to bridge the gap in community relations" [Lanarkshire]

"I think we need to be seen out there and to be doing normal things. I've noticed even in the past 6 months in Princes Street there are lots more shop assistants wearing hijab. That's the kind of things we need to be doing. I'm not saying that we should be changing I think we just need to be seen as being part of society, but that's difficult because we don't want to be diluting out practices so that we fit in with other people" [Edinburgh]

"What we can do is get out and integrate into the society so that people get to know them [Muslim women] instead of reading in the newspaper or hearing the news" [Edinburgh]

"Many Muslims do not participate in the community i.e. PTA in schools there are no Muslim parents. Muslims need to improve relations within themselves and relations with non-Muslims." [Aberdeen]

"I think it's just a matter of ignorance. We need to make sure we're all going around in Edinburgh, that we're kind of moderate looking, approachable. Obviously we're going to look

different because of the hijab and things, but saying hello to people as we walk down the street, things like that, look friendly. So that people think, Oh these women aren't oppressed, they might want to find out more about Islam." [Edinburgh]

"I wish there was more interaction in Aberdeen and more events for Muslims to engage with non Muslims" [Aberdeen]

Echoing the *Muslim Women Talk Scotland* findings Muslim women clearly indicated their willingness to be part of wider society.

Politics also make us question our identity. I think there should be social- political groups for Muslim woman where they can discuss issues and have their voice heard politically. They need to get more involved politically. Muslims also need to be educated on their own Islamic Rights." (Glasgow)

Good practice example

- Amina MWRC Community Ambassador Project, which is funded by the Scottish Government, will work with Muslim women to develop the skills and opportunities to provide information on Muslims and their beliefs to organisations in their local area.

Recommendations 5:

- **Mainstream and voluntary sector agencies should tailor their work to harness Muslim women's willingness to engage in society by creating opportunities for engagement between communities.**
- **Funders should recognise the value of work with single communities as a stepping stone to enable their broader engagement.**
- **Muslim and minority ethnic organisations should work to encourage women to develop their confidence and become more engaged in wider society.**

Role of mosques:

In all of the groups the women had strong opinions about the role of Mosques in encouraging understanding between communities.

"What we need to do is open the mosque up, make it seem inviting to people, advertise that we're giving out free literature." (Edinburgh)

"Need to teach people about the good parts of Islam, like having more open days at the mosque" (Dundee)

"Some Muslim don't agree about doing exhibition in the mosque. Somebody heard saying to someone that we should not bend over backwards to explain Islam to non Muslims but I think this is very important so we can give message of Islam so they can deal with the misconception of Muslim which come from the media. So when they come to the mosque many people come with the impression that Muslim women are depressed. Then we explain to them about Islam and Muslim women's role in it, then they go away with the different impression about Islam. So we should make good relationship with non Muslim so they can understand about us." (Edinburgh)

"We want people to come into the mosque." (Lanarkshire)

"Interfaith groups are held regularly at the Methodist church. Bringing people into the mosque and integrating within the community, I think the mosque does a lot of good work doing that." (Edinburgh)

Recommendations 6:

- **Mosques have an important role in creating better community relations within the local community, through encouraging dialogue e.g. interfaith meetings, seminars and open days.**

Reporting Racism/Islamophobia / Police:

Despite Muslim women’s widespread experiences of racist and/or Islamophobic harassment, such incidents more often than not went unreported. This pattern is also highlighted by other agencies and research into reporting of racist harassment.⁴

In each area the percentage of women who had experienced racist and/or Islamophobic abuse, and the percentage of these women who had reported it, is as follows:

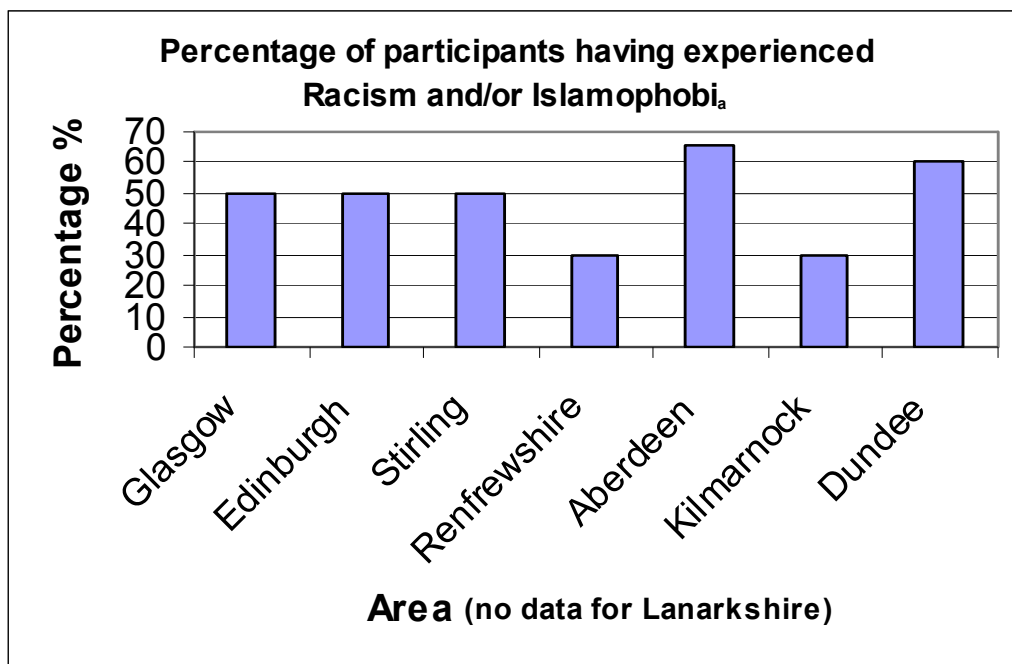


Figure 1

⁴ E.g. Positive Action in Housing Annual Report 2007 which also cites 2 year research project by Glasgow University 2005 which identified 80% racist incidents go unreported.

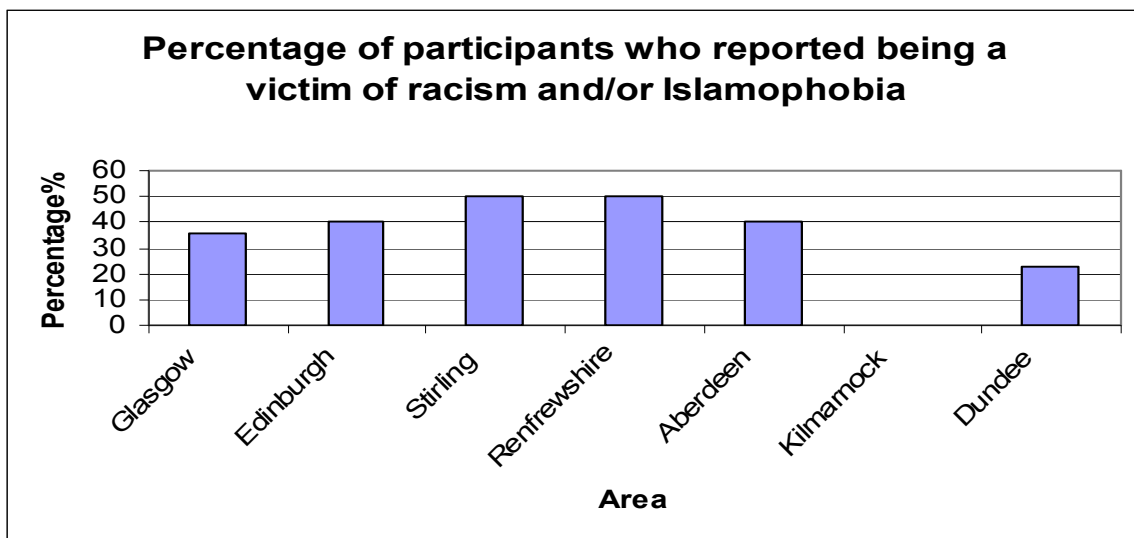


Figure 2

Reasons for not reporting Racist and Islamophobic crimes:

Participants gave a variety of reasons why they had chosen not to report racism and/or Islamophobia.

There is a feeling that the Police are unable to do anything because the crime is not serious enough. This demonstrates a lack of awareness of the Police’s role and of the wider purpose of reporting these incidents, such as developing a real picture of racism and Islamophobia in Scotland, and “intelligence” to enable the Police to take pro-active measures to prevent incidents.

There is some evidence to suggest that racism and Islamophobia are tolerated by Muslim women as inevitable. It appears that some women do not consider verbal harassment to be serious enough to be reported, despite the fact that it is an unpleasant experience.

“It seems too trivial, would report it if I really felt threatened or in danger” [Kilmarnock]

“Don’t think it is significant enough” [Kilmarnock] *“I didn’t think it is important”* [Dundee]

“I would not report racism unless it was really, really serious” [Dundee]

“It was just verbal abuse” [Renfrewshire] *“I didn’t know the names of the abusers”* [Dundee]

“Don’t expect much from them [the police], police don’t show any interest” [Edinburgh]

“[the incident was] not significant enough, and what could the police do?” [Aberdeen]

“incident not serious enough” [Aberdeen] *“[it was] passing words”* [Aberdeen]

“A man shouted abuse at me once, but I didn’t report it to the police.” [Edinburgh]

“I dealt with it myself” [Dundee] *“I just ignore it, might make matters worse”* [Dundee]

“It was not direct abuse” [Dundee] *“I wasn’t bothered”* [Stirling]

Some women felt it was not culturally acceptable to contact the Police, and for some, experiences of Police in their country of origin as corrupt deterred them. They did not know what police would be like here.

"It's culturally not acceptable [to contact the Police], our men say No to calling the Police" [Dundee]

"I've had one bad experience with the police and it has put me off completely, I think they have a bad attitude" [Dundee]

"I didn't report it because of fear of Police" [Dundee]

"Police need to receive more training on other faiths and cultures" [Stirling]

"I didn't report it because of family emotions" [Dundee] *"...because of the family"* [Edinburgh]

"I did not report an incident because I did not feel comfortable and I am [a] British born, educated and confident woman. How would someone who is not deal with it?" [Dundee]

Experiences of those who had reported Racism/Islamophobia to the Police:

"it was reported but Police wasn't helpful at all, no awareness" [Stirling]

"I called the police one day as I was being racially abused by kids in my close. They came the next day, but didn't take the issue very seriously." [Edinburgh]

"My son was suffering from racism and it took over 2 weeks for the police to see us" [Aberdeen]

However there is a recognition that Police's powers are limited:

"I have used the Police and they were good but at the end of the day what can they really do about racism" [Aberdeen]

This last comment also illustrates lack of understanding of the wider purpose of reporting.

"It would be helpful to know what you can report." [Edinburgh]

"My friend had her scarf pulled off on the bus one day, after a lot of persuasion I convinced her to call the police. If she hadn't come to me she might not have known who to contact."

Views of Police in general:

Many women welcomed the efforts made by police forces to engage the Muslim community as well as to re-assure them after the terrorist attacks in the UK.

"Police have good relationship with Mosque" [Lanarkshire]

"Police were very good after 7/7 and Glasgow attack. Came round to our house and said if there are any problems to contact them" [Kilmarnock]

"I feel comfortable phoning the police" [Glasgow]

However others indicated that they were fearful of police and authorities, mainly due to the post 7/7 and 9/11 climate and the fear of being arrested on suspicion of being a terrorist.

“My children are older and are at university, I have fears that they may be taken to the police station.” [Glasgow]

Other participants felt that the police lacked awareness of their needs and of those of the community, or felt that these were not taken seriously:

“Police need to take a more active role” [Renfrewshire]

“The police have a lack of awareness and education about other cultures and religions” [Renfrewshire]

Despite these comments, 88% of women who had had contact with the police rated their experience as either “very good” or “average”. (see Appendix 1, Question 6)

Examples of good practice:

- Third party reporting/remote reporting schemes remove many of the barriers Muslim women gave as reasons for not reporting, such as fears as to what the repercussions on the family will be, however many women were unaware of such schemes even where they operated in their area.
- Amina MWRC’s work in partnership with Police Forces (Strathclyde, Tayside, Fife) around Scotland including seminars aiming to inform Muslim women of the purpose of reporting such incidents and issues such as Domestic Abuse
- Since the listening exercise was conducted Lothian & Borders Police and Strathclyde Police have held dialogue sessions to discuss people’s fears about the powers granted to the police by the Terrorism Acts of 2000 and 2006.

Recommendations 7:

- **Promote remote reporting/ 3rd party reporting amongst Muslim women. There is a need to raise awareness of the schemes as well as of the importance of reporting such incidents.**
- **Outreach education to communities on the role and methods of Police/Procurator Fiscal – e.g. seminars between community based organisations such as Amina MWRC and local Police Forces**
- **More information seminars providing an opportunity for Muslim women and men to raise their concerns about Stop and Search Powers and other powers associated with anti-terrorist legislation**

EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

Employment / Unemployment

Minority ethnic women, and particularly Muslim women, are much less likely to be in employment and are at higher risk of underemployment and unemployment than women in the population as a whole, even if they are well qualified⁵.

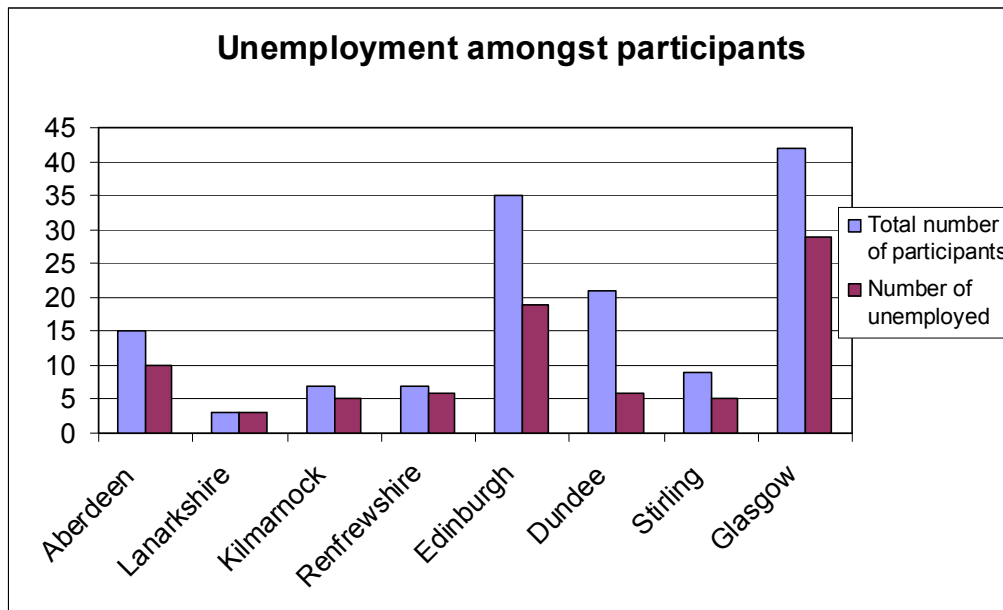


FIGURE 3

Figure 3 shows the proportion of participants who were unemployed. The Muslim women who attended the listening exercises cannot be seen as representative of all Scottish Muslim women; indeed the events were held during normal working hours and were intended to give women who are less likely to have their voices heard the opportunity to do so.

Recommendations 1:

- **Government and employment bodies should monitor employment statistics by faith group as well as ethnicity**

Barriers To Finding Employment

There are a number of barriers preventing Muslim women who wish to work from seeking employment. This not only denies them opportunities to develop but it is also detrimental to Scotland's economy to overlook this skilled and available workforce.

Figure 4 (below) illustrates the variety of barriers faced by Muslim women when seeking employment as established from the questionnaires completed by participants during the

⁵ *Moving on Up? Visible Minority Ethnic Women at Work A summary of the first phase of research for Scotland Equal Opportunities Commission Scotland 2006 & Moving on up? The Way Forward. Report on the investigation into Visible Minority Ethnic Women at Work in Scotland, Equal Opportunities Commission Scotland, May 2007*

listening events. Some of these barriers are common to Muslim and non-Muslim women alike but they affect Muslim women disproportionately. The questionnaire asked closed questions which therefore frames the answers. However, in workshops many Muslim women also cited experience of discrimination as a factor affecting their employability.

Some women felt that they had been discriminated against because they were Muslim or that their faith has a bearing on the way in which they were treated in employment and education:

“ 9/11 forced me out of my job as Human resources manager at the Hilton hotel” [Glasgow]

“I was looking for jobs and it was quite challenging in getting a job. Everyone was happy to meet me, but when they met me they didn’t want to give me the job, for so many reasons. I think one of the main reasons was that I wore hijab. I am no longer looking for a job and I do feel more secure and accepted in this culture but I don’t know how I will feel when I go back to looking for a job.” [Edinburgh]

“So far it has been fine, but I don’t want my hijab to be a barrier to employment. I have heard that others have had some bad experiences. When I apply for jobs, this is on my mind.” [Edinburgh]

“One of my friends had a bad experience with the job centre. She thinks because she wears a hijab she doesn’t get a job.” [Glasgow]

“I have had good experiences, but I have had problems getting a job” [Glasgow]

“I have a degree, very well educated but I cannot even get a job in a call centre, why is this? I don’t know, I speak good English! I want to work but no one will employ me”. [Dundee]

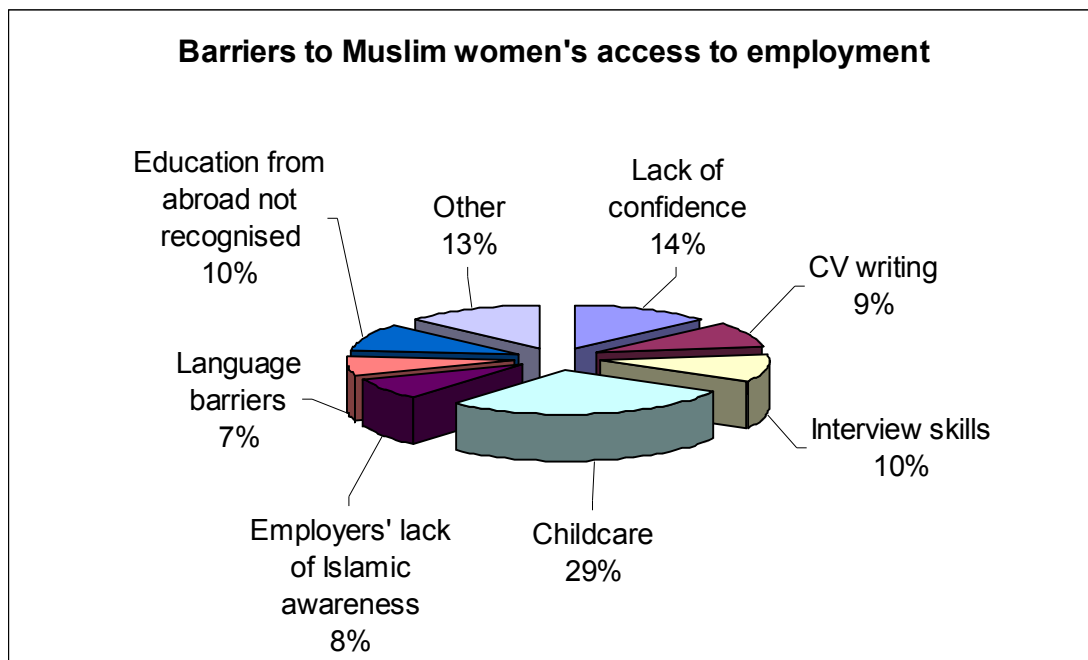


FIGURE 4

It is sometimes perceived that Muslim women do not want to work or that their families hold them back. This was not the case in our workshops, and Amina MWRC's casework experience identifies a large number of Muslim women who wish to enter the employment market. Other research also gives the lie to this assumption⁶.

"We need jobs for mums who stayed at home with the kids and now the kids have left home" [Dundee]

It is apparent from Figure 4 and from some of the following quotes that despite women's willingness to work they face further barriers. Many similar issues were found in 2005 research among Ethnic Minority women in Glasgow undertaken by Meridian.⁷

Childcare:

The lack of affordable and appropriate childcare was identified by the participants as the single biggest barrier to them gaining employment. Almost one third of unemployed women stated that lack of childcare prevented them from getting a job.

"We need a crèche service in our area" [Renfrewshire]

"Childcare has stopped me from working, I don't get help with child-care" [Glasgow]

The lack of affordable childcare affects all women regardless of faith or ethnicity, but given the demographic of a younger population the lack of appropriate childcare disproportionately affects Muslim women. Furthermore, Amina MWRC is aware from its casework that Muslim women have been deterred from accessing childcare because of the lack of faith/culturally appropriate services. This finding was also highlighted in the EOC's Moving on Up Scotland reports (as above)

Recommendations 2:

- **Scottish government and local authorities should ensure an adequate supply of both affordable, and faith and culturally appropriate childcare.**
- **Childcare providers should ensure their services meet needs of their local communities and access training for staff to ensure this.**

Lack of understanding of Islamic requirements by employers:

The lack of Islamic awareness by certain employers was clearly identified as a concern:

"Need more training for employers, for example MEEM [a faith and cultural awareness training provider], equal opportunities training" [Dundee]

Recommendations 3:

- **Employers should consider providing training on Islam and the customs of Muslims to staff and managers.**

⁶ *Moving on Up?* Equal Opportunities Commission Scotland as above

⁷ Abdalla Asma, Corrin Chris *Research into Barriers to Employment of Ethnic Minority Women, BME women: Some missed opportunities reveal what is needed to enrich Glasgow, the diverse city of Scotland* Meridian 2005

Lack of recognition of degree from abroad:

10% of unemployed participants felt that the lack of recognition of their degree from abroad was preventing them from gaining employment. This again figured in the EOC Moving on Up Scotland research.

Recommendations 4:

- **Government and employment organisations should ensure there is wider availability of information about acceptability of overseas qualifications for employers and jobseekers.**
- **Government, employment and training organisations should promote Information about conversion courses and qualification upgrades.**

Education, skills and confidence

Women identified education opportunities as crucial to their personal development:

"We need more education" [Stirling]

"I think there should be another centre like MWRC where I live. I would like help in training to do with personal development". [Glasgow]

"I dress in quite a western way, but at university when I tell a lecturer my name they realise that I am in fact a Muslim and it is then they treat me differently, and I feel I have to prove myself to them more than others would have to if they were not Muslim or an ethnic minority" [Glasgow]

Good practice:

Educational institutions' awareness of Islam was highlighted by some participants as a real positive:

"In my college I have prayer room and I pray when it is time to pray and I tell other Muslims we have a room to pray" [Edinburgh]

"The school where I go is great because there is somewhere to go and pray so you don't miss any prayers and during Ramadan they open the library or the IT room so that we don't see others eating. It's good because you feel so conscious" [Edinburgh]

Muslim Women's lack of confidence:

This was the second biggest barrier identified by women that prevented them from obtaining employment.

"There is a lack of motivation and confidence among the Muslim community" [Stirling]

This is sometimes linked to a break in employment when having children:

"You need to help women to get back to work after having children. Amina MWRC was the only one that would help me" [Glasgow]

Lack of interview and CV skills:

"I need help with interviews skills and writing my CV; that would help with my personal development" [Glasgow]

"We should get training for interviews and basic skills and computing too" [Glasgow]

"I need to get skills and work experience and free education for over 30 years old women" [Glasgow]

A range of agencies provide support with these skills but either the participants were unaware of them or did not wish to use them as women felt services would not be organised in a way they would feel comfortable with.

"There's no female only classes, that's what puts me off" [Glasgow]

Good Practice

Amina MWRC's Capacity Building project, including its volunteering scheme, provides Muslim women with opportunities to develop their skills and confidence in a women only environment in which they feel comfortable.

Poor English Language Skills:

8% of the unemployed participants stated that language was a barrier to them gaining employment. However, only 5% of all participants had attended ESOL classes.

While poor English can be a barrier to some Muslim women finding employment, unemployment itself can reduce the amount of interaction women have with other English speakers thus reducing how quickly women learn English.

Amina MWRC has identified through its casework a significant number of older women who, despite living in the UK for many decades, are unable to communicate in English and have little contact with, or awareness of, mainstream services. Many of these women approach Amina MWRC when they are left on their own e.g. due to bereavement or marriage breakdown. They are then left without the help of the husband on whom they had relied to deal with financial and other issues.

There is a clear demand for more English classes:

"Elderly ladies find it hard to communicate outside because of language barrier" [Renfrewshire]

"I want to speak English and be able to socialise more with other" [Glasgow]

"We need English classes" [Edinburgh]

"It would be good to have languages classes in our area" [Renfrewshire]

"Aberdeen is difficult for women who do not understand English" [Aberdeen]

Other employment skills

Many participants expressed the need for more classes offering training in skills which would increase women's employability such as computer classes:

"we should get training on computer skills" [Glasgow]

"Govanhill centre can only take a limited number for computing classes" [Glasgow]

Recommendations 6:

- **Increased availability of ESOL classes, including classes for women who are already citizens, such as older women, as well as the new combined ESOL/citizenship classes for newer migrants**
- **Education authorities and Community Learning providers should provide more opportunities for adult learning in a faith and culturally sensitive environment,**
- **Service providers should ensure that information on the support they offer is made available to Muslim women through targeted marketing, and providing publicity materials in different languages.**

HEALTH

Health Services

Alastair Pringle, Patient Manager, Scottish Government Health Directories states⁸:

“Understanding and responding to the religious and belief needs of patients as they relate to their use of the NHS services is no longer an option, but essential. People are at their most vulnerable when they are ill, and every effort should be made to meet their needs, where possible. They should not be encountering barriers or difficulties.”

All the Muslim women that attended the listening exercise across Scotland were users of NHS services and accessed their local GP. The issues raised had one paramount commonality – a feeling by Muslim women service users that there is a lack of awareness and understanding of Muslim women’s fundamental faith beliefs within Health services. When discussing health care many topics emerged regarding maternity care, circumcision, mental health and counselling.

This section of the report will highlight the needs of Muslim women through their recent experiences of the health service.

“There should be more support for Muslim women in accessing the health services and particularly the maternity service, after birth care etc”. (Edinburgh)

Recommendations 1:

- **Increased understanding of cultural and faith issues, via staff training for all practitioners’ to increase recognition and delivery of patient’s needs.**

Maternity Care

Lack of female doctors is a worry for many Muslim women especially during pregnancy and childbirth; creating feelings of embarrassment and discomfort, along with fears of lack of modesty and privacy.

“In hospital the lack of female surgeons are a problem and interpreters too” (Glasgow)

“When I was giving birth there were only men to deliver baby. In this situation I did not mind, but would be nice to have females there. I think under all circumstances where you show your body, most women prefer to have women” (Aberdeen)

“I also would like it if male consultants were informed that they shouldn’t uncover Muslim mothers’ unnecessarily” (Edinburgh)

In many Islamic countries child birth is a female only sphere; Muslim women may not be aware of the procedures in Scotland and where there is also a language barrier misunderstandings and incorrect assumptions on both sides can cause complications and great distress to the mother.

“I would like more support during maternity” (Edinburgh)

⁸ *Religion and Belief Matter An Information Resource for Healthcare Staff* Scottish Interfaith Council 2007

“The NHS should definitely be improved for pregnant women. There was a pregnant Pakistani lady in the hospital where I was; she did not understand the nurses at all and there were no interpreting services available for her. I also felt that aftercare by midwives is not adequate because the NHS sent a different midwife to my house every day and there was no consistency.” (Glasgow)

“This woman came from Egypt and hardly knew English and her husband was Polish and when she went to the hospital the doctors and the midwives did explain every thing but she could not understand. She was given a huge book on childbirth and pregnancy and everything but she couldn’t understand any of it and no one was prepared to help her.” (Edinburgh)

The 2001, National Institute for Clinical Excellence report “Why Mothers Die”⁹, found that women from ethnic minority groups, including those from countries with predominantly Muslim populations such as Bangladesh and Pakistan were twice as likely to die during pregnancy or just after birth than white women. This highlights the gravity of this issue.

Good Practice

Amina MWRC aims to research and develop training on the needs of Muslim women during maternity and on some common misconceptions to be delivered to NHS maternity services in Glasgow in 2008/09. Amina MWRC is also working to support the establishment of a peer support network for women pre - and post – childbirth.

Recommendations 2:

- **Outreach to Muslim women via community based services incorporating health professionals, local voluntary organisations and community groups with regard to antenatal and postnatal care along with general health and wellbeing issues.**
- **Ensure availability of translated materials and interpretation services to ensure that the patient fully understands the medical terms, treatments and support available to them. Family members should not be relied on as this compromises patient confidentiality.**

Cultural and Religious Customs

A large proportion of the women who attended the events said that overall they were happy with the health care that they have received; however they felt disappointed that the facilities and staff had been insensitive to their religious needs and preferences.

“When I had my baby, I wanted to shave his hair, but the midwife asked why as it was so lovely and thick, but I said we need to shave the newborns hair as we consider it unclean.” (Lanarkshire)

Circumcision

An issue that was raised frequently in the sessions is the delay in obtaining circumcision for male babies. This issue has also been raised for Glasgow and the west of Scotland on the Amina Helpline.

⁹ *Why Mothers Die* National Institute for Clinical Excellence 2001

"We use the circumcision services with the NHS, but it takes time. It should be done in the hospital or in the mother's home. It is one of our needs because every Muslim male has to be circumcised. What is happening now is that mothers are travelling down to England to get their children circumcised. In Denmark they will do it right away, but here there is a waiting list, so what is a young girl to do? It's like Jews; they need circumcision just like us. My grandson is eight months old and there has still not been any word." (Lanarkshire)

"At the moment the NHS says this (circumcision) is not that critical." (Lanarkshire)

"The midwives seemed reluctant to tell me that circumcision is available on the NHS, but that there is 3 month waiting list. Privately it would be very expensive." (Edinburgh)

"They are travelling down south to do it....They used to charge £50 but now the price has gone up to £100". (Edinburgh)

Recommendations 3:

- **NHS should increase availability of circumcision services for babies across Scotland**

Halal Food

Suitable food in hospitals is a major issue for Muslims: where halal meals are provided they can lack variety, or are too spicy for non Asian Muslims to eat and in some hospitals women have not been offered a halal option. Food is a vital component in making a healthy recovery. Along with being a comfort when away from home, not providing suitable halal food can result in a lack of essential vitamins for the patient, discomfort and possibly a cause of premature discharge.

"They say a cheese sandwich is halal, my dad was expected to eat these for nearly a week, this is not a suitable halal meal" (Dundee)

"In hospitals halal food is not always available" (Stirling)

"They wont allow us to bring in our own food, but I never eat this kind of food and I cannot eat the meat, I felt like I was being fussy but I just wanted some nice food that would give me some energy to recover" (Aberdeen)

Recommendations 4:

- **Suitable halal meals, with a variety of options, should be available in all hospitals in Scotland. Hospital staff should be encouraged to offer patients the halal menu and ensure patients are aware that there are halal options.**

Support and Counselling/Mental Health

Many Muslim women who suffer from depression and other mental health difficulties, are unsure where to get the appropriate support. It seems to be harder for minority ethnic people to access "talking treatments".¹⁰ Many of those who have received counselling from

¹⁰ REACH Community Health Project with Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre *Research into mental health issues of Muslim women in South Glasgow* (provisional title) Forthcoming

mainstream agencies feel that it is not beneficial as their religion and culture are not being recognised.

“My daughter visited a counsellor through the NHS after an attempted overdose: never ever again though! The counsellor had no grasp of the situation; she did not know anything about our values, culture or religion. She just kept asking me questions about men having four wives it was a complete farce and waste of time” (Dundee)

“I would like counselling as I suffer from depression but there is a lack of understanding and takes too much explaining” (Dundee)

“GP’s just don’t offer it to us, they think we don’t want or need it! But that’s not true, we should still be offered it, I feel shy to ask”. (Dundee)

“I have attended a postnatal depression unit, but it has been hard as it is predominantly non-Muslim. It would be better if we had a Muslim group, so we can speak out about our own issues.” (Edinburgh)

“I think they would have to be trained to understand. In counselling there is a big need for marriage counselling. Every 2nd client of mine has this problem, but don’t want to go to a non-Muslim”. (Glasgow)

“After my divorce I sought counselling and I felt my grief was not understood as divorce is now a norm” (Aberdeen)

“Dundee is stuck in a time warp with relation to services for Asian/Muslim women Doctors should bring back in house counselling” (Dundee)

“A lot of Muslim women are told that depression doesn’t happen to strong believers there is a stigma attached to anything like that within the community” (Aberdeen)

“Language is a barrier. Imagine having a problem and trying to explain it in a different language, also a barrier to accessing services is that some women cannot read or write in their own language.” (Dundee)

“I would worry about confidentiality” (Dundee)

Good Practice – Amina MWRC

- Amina MWRC currently provides counselling services offering an Islamic perspective and cultural sensitivity – and undertakes bereavement work with CRUSE and Palliative care services.
- Amina MWRC has recently been granted funding for family mediation and counselling with Scottish Marriage Care.

Recommendations 5 :

- **Adequate funding and training to ensure availability of culturally and faith sensitive counselling services including bilingual speakers and interpreters where necessary.**

OTHER COMMUNITY FACILITIES (Mainstream and Islamic)

Many of the women who attended the event used a variety of community services including local Mosques, women only swimming, and arts classes; however most of those who accessed facilities used classes tailored to their needs as a Muslim woman. Where these were not available most women did not access services. In this report community services will be divided into mainstream community facilities and Mosques & Islamic centres, for the overall purpose of conveying the women's experiences and opinions.

Mainstream Community Facilities

The workshops and questionnaires highlight the need for the opportunity for women to interact and socialise, as 63% of participants expressed the desire for women's groups. This figure was higher in more rural areas illustrating the feeling of isolation and lack of appropriate community activities.

Leisure facilities

Leisure facilities were widely discussed in the workshops especially women only swimming and exercise classes. The questionnaires highlighted that only 16% of the women currently accessed culturally sensitive leisure activities; in some cities there were no facilities available for women only and where there were women only classes issues arose such as a having a male life guard, an outside window resulting in no privacy and late evening classes. During the events it was clearly established that there is a high demand for accessible and frequent leisure activities in all the areas we visited.

"We need sports activities for Muslim women" (Aberdeen)

"Need community based facilities that cater for our needs and that are "acceptable" places where women can go" (Aberdeen)

"I would like a gym just for women. I know some gyms offer 1 day a week for women to come along. But 1 day out of 7 days a week is not enough." (Glasgow)

" There's certain things, like sisters wanting women - only gyms and more swimming times, which I think are of benefit to lots of women in the community, because lots of women, non-Muslim women want to have women only swimming times and women only gyms." (Edinburgh)

"I use ladies only swimming, but this is only in the evenings and the lifeguards can sometimes be male" (Stirling)

"Female only swimming classes during the day when kids in school" (Renfrewshire)

"We really need gym and exercise facilities for Muslim women" (Stirling)

"Having social activities such as ladies swimming, computer classes, cooking - things to do for fun will help us get to know each other better." (Aberdeen)

"We need council run women only gyms" (Dundee)

However these are not the views of every woman:

“Just because we’re Muslim, because we’re in the media and a lot of attention is given to us, I don’t think we should push it so far that we’re treated differently and we get special treatment. If a facility is not available we should look to our own entrepreneurs to provide it, not always screaming out saying you should provide, you should give me this because I don’t want alcohol. It’s about being reasonable and realistic. We don’t have special facilities for the Jewish communities, not every community can be catered for to such an extent that you start segregating that community.” (Edinburgh)

Recommendations 1:

- **Culture and Leisure services should provide a range of women only leisure classes, at a variety of times which are culturally and faith sensitive i.e. no male presence and windows covered to ensure complete privacy.**
- **Crèche facilities should be provided to enable women with young children access to facilities.**

Advice and Information

The need for clear, concise and correct information and advice was evident from the women attending the listening exercises. Only 30% of the women had used advice services despite many women looking for information regarding child benefits, housing, employment and other forms of information such as marriage advice and other forms of emotional support. The majority of women seemed unaware of the resources that are available to them both from mainstream services and voluntary organisations.

“We don’t know much about what services are available. There needs to be better advertising.” (Glasgow)

“There’s no centrally located information point that’s the problem. Everything’s separated.” (Edinburgh)

“A service where people can partner up with bilingual people who can help them around the city, until they have the confidence and ability to do it alone” (Dundee)

“It would be great if we could just have a one stop shop, all the information in one place and then if you were going in about something personal, no one would know why you were there” (Dundee)

Recommendations 2:

- **Available services should undertake targeted advertising to ensure that women are aware of services available to them.**
- **Outreach work should be undertaken to community facilities Muslim women already access.**
- **Mainstream agencies should undertake partnership work with BME organisations.**
- **Mainstream agencies should provide staff training to raise awareness of cultural and faith issues and equip staff to deal with the needs of Muslim women.**
- **One stop shops for advice and services would help women deal with confusing bureaucracies**

- **Befriending/ buddying/ advocacy schemes could help women access services and become more confident in utilising them**

Mosques and Islamic Organisations

In all of the groups the women had strong opinions and ideals about the role of Mosques in the Muslim community.

In Lanarkshire the mosque clearly plays a big role in providing the focus for Muslim identity in Lanarkshire:

“People see the mosque and understand more about Islam. They see people arriving for Friday prayers and they know it’s not an “underground” thing” [Lanarkshire]

In different cities the Mosques varied in levels of community activity. Glasgow and Edinburgh Mosques seemed to have more frequent events than Dundee and Aberdeen. Although Glasgow and Edinburgh Mosques are more developed, many women felt there was still room for improvement. In places such as Dundee the Central Mosque is viewed as great a space and a beautiful building but it is an untapped resource as it is extremely inactive and does not really engage with Muslim women. The women in Aberdeen and Kilmarnock desire a larger Mosque that can accommodate both males and females, with hopes that this would unite the community. In some areas there is no Mosque leaving the community fragmented and in need of religious classes for children. The consensus from the events was that the Mosques have a responsibility to educate not only the Muslim community about Islam but also be a responsible educator in the wider community.

“Work needs to be done with the Mosque to help women practise Islam properly. Mosques need to be were more accessible.” (Dundee)

“The Mosques need to educate Muslim men about social issues and problems; they need to know the difference between culture and religion.” (Dundee)

“Some people are opposed to come to the mosque because of a backward mentality...” (Lanarkshire)

“Edinburgh mosques all work separately, for different ethnic groups, Indians, Pakistanis etc there is a communication barrier, Arabs are separate from Asians. Everyone has separate events.” (Edinburgh)

It became apparent that women were looking to the mosque to provide wider services which were not forthcoming:

“We need a bigger Mosque with community centre, educational and advice centre on Islamic issues & other issues and more community participation in interfaith events etc.” (Aberdeen)

“Once a month I go to Glasgow for a hadith class, but it is difficult in Edinburgh. Having a woman’s group would be helpful.” (Edinburgh)

“As a mother, sometimes I don’t find places, even in the mosque, that’s my problem with Muslim society, they cant help me to teach them language or Quran or any other Islam in general.” (Edinburgh)

“The Sheikh is always busy when you need him. I have to look on internet for answers to my questions.” (Aberdeen)

“Only information we get is from (this) halaqa. It’s the only social gathering for most women and kids. It is important for Muslim kids to meet other Muslim kids.” (Aberdeen)

“Women’s rights are overlooked by community leaders.” (Dundee)

Good Practice

Lanarkshire Mosque was recently awarded The Young Scottish Muslim Youth Project award for its contributions to catering for the needs of the Muslim Community be it social, welfare or educational. It has also been at the heart of building bridges between communities, agencies and establishments by welcoming all to the mosque and holding awareness days.

Recommendations 3:

- **Mosques should develop their potential as a community resource that binds the diverse Muslim community together.**
- **Mosques should develop their role as an education centre, a place to seek solace, support, advice and information, as well as a place of worship.**
- **Mosques should reach out to women and young people, ensuring that their needs are met.**
- **Mosques and Islamic organisations should acknowledge and address social issues and topics of relevance to Muslim women, men and children i.e. anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, drugs etc.**

METHODOLOGY

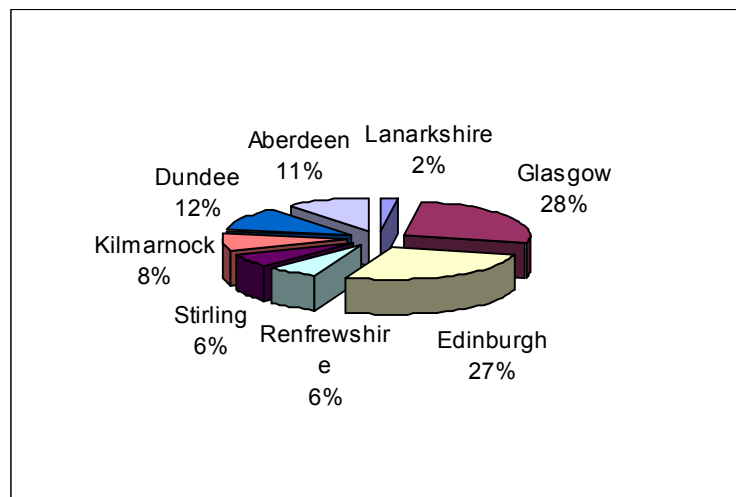
150 Muslim women took part in the listening exercise leading to this report. It was conducted from November 2007 to February 2008 and took the form of events in the following areas:

- Glasgow
- Edinburgh
- Stirling
- Renfrewshire
- Lanarkshire
- Dundee
- Aberdeen

No event was held in Kilmarnock but data was collected in the form of questionnaires.

This report also draws on the experience of Amina MWRC through its advice and development work and refers to research undertaken elsewhere.

Figure 5 details the percentage of participants for each area.



Events were publicised in two main ways:

- Posters and leaflets were distributed in the areas where events were held in community centres and organisations, in GP surgeries, libraries, schools, etc.
- Coffee mornings were held locally prior to the events when friends and family were invited to attend the forthcoming event and to spread information about it by word of mouth.

The events provided an opportunity to bring together Muslim women of various backgrounds, especially women whose voices are not often heard. Interpreters and crèche facilities were provided at each event to maximise participation. In areas where there was sufficient demand, workshops were held in Urdu/Punjabi.

The events took the form of workshops during which women were encouraged to share their views on their experiences of being a Muslim woman in Scotland; and of public services and community relations. Responses were taped with the consent of the women attending. Guidance questions gave some structure and comparability to workshops. These are reproduced in Appendix 1. To complement the information gathered during the workshops questionnaires were completed by participants. In Kilmarnock, where no event was held, questionnaires were completed during a visit to the local Muslim women's group.

Different Experiences:

It is important to keep in mind that due to the limited sample the views of participants cannot be taken as representative of all Muslim women in Scotland. It is crucial not to generalise the information provided in this report since factors such as culture, ethnicity, age, level of education and many others can have a bearing on women's experiences. Every Muslim woman is different and it is essential not to stereotype.

However this by no means removes the validity of the issues raised by participants. Furthermore, these concerns echo many of those raised during Amina - the Muslim Women's Resource Centre's interaction with Muslim women over the past 10 years, and are congruent with findings of previous Scottish and UK consultation exercises.

Limitations

- The sample of 150 women provides a snapshot rather than an in depth study of Muslim women's views in Scotland
- Geography: The largest number of participants were from the main urban centres of population. This reflects the distribution of the Muslim community in Scotland. Events were held in smaller, semi-rural locations to ensure that the voice of those in more isolated areas was heard. To our knowledge the geographic spread of women involved in the Listening Exercise is unique for Muslim women in Scotland.
- The questions asked during workshops were designed to ensure a level of consistency in our approach to information gathering. While this may have sometimes constrained the topics discussed, the discussion was allowed to move freely, giving participants the chance to express their own concerns.
- The questionnaires were aimed primarily to give women a chance to raise issues they had not fully discussed in workshop sessions. Their limitation is that they asked closed questions thus limiting the information mainly to topics asked.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

Amina – The Muslim Women’s Resource Centre “Muslim Women Have Your Say” Survey			
Q1	What age group are you?		
	16 – 24	<input type="checkbox"/>	25 – 34 <input type="checkbox"/>
	35 – 45	<input type="checkbox"/>	56 or over <input type="checkbox"/>
Q2	Do you have children?		
	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Q3	If yes to question 2, how old are they? Please tick all that apply.		
	0 – 5	<input type="checkbox"/>	6 – 12 <input type="checkbox"/>
	13 – 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	19 or over <input type="checkbox"/>
Q4	What type of accommodation do you stay in?		
	Own home	<input type="checkbox"/>	Local authority <input type="checkbox"/>
	Housing association	<input type="checkbox"/>	Private let <input type="checkbox"/>
	Stay with family/friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q5	Are you employed?		
	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
	Carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disabled / Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>
Q6	If you have had contact with the police, was your experience?		
	Very good	<input type="checkbox"/>	Average <input type="checkbox"/>
	Below average	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bad <input type="checkbox"/>
Q7	Does your current health service meet your needs?		
	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Q8	What education have you accessed in your area?		
	Community education	<input type="checkbox"/>	Local College <input type="checkbox"/>
	Private training company	<input type="checkbox"/>	Back to work <input type="checkbox"/>
	ESOL/Literacy classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q9	If you are unemployed what prevents you from getting a job?		
	Lack of confidence		<input type="checkbox"/>
	CV writing		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Interview skills		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Child care		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Lack of Islamic awareness by employers		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Language barriers		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Education from abroad/not recognised		<input type="checkbox"/>
Q10	What services do you use in your local area?		
	Advice & Information		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Advocacy		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Befriending		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Women’s Aid		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Counselling/ Bereavement Counselling		<input type="checkbox"/>

	Listening services		<input type="checkbox"/>
	Culturally sensitive leisure services		<input type="checkbox"/>
Q11	What other services do you think you need in your area? Please state		

Q12	Do you use public transport?		
	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Q13	How would you improve your transport links in your area? Please state		

Q14	Are your mainstream services, in your opinion culturally/ faith sensitive?		
	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Q15	What type of classes would you like in your area?		
	Art	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sewing <input type="checkbox"/>
	Cooking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parenting <input type="checkbox"/>
	Therapy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Women's groups <input type="checkbox"/>
Q16	Have you had racial or religious abuse from the public?		
	Racial	<input type="checkbox"/>	Religious <input type="checkbox"/>
	Both	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q17	Was the abuse reported to the police?		
	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Q18	If abuse not reported, why not? Please state		

Q19	Do you have any comments to make about your experiences and/or any issues you have faced as a Muslim woman living in Scotland?		

Thank you for completing the survey

APPENDIX 2: WORKSHOP QUESTIONS

1. "How do you feel being a Muslim woman in Scotland in 2007?"
2. What services are you currently accessing?
(During this the facilitator can further probe with the following questions: what are your experiences of these services? would you use the service again?)
3. What services do you need in your area?
(Facilitator can further probe with, is there any reason you would not access these services?)
- 4.. What do you need for your personal development? (i.e. community, mainstream...)
- 5.. What in your opinion would aid community relations? (this may bring up issues of racism or islamophobia)

APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF ISLAMIC TERMS

Eid – Day of feasting and celebration for Muslims. There are two Eid festivals – Eid ul Fitr, at the end of the month of Ramadhan, and Eid ul Adha which falls at the end of the period of the Hajj pilgrimage and commemorates Prophet Abraham’s (peace be upon him), willingness to obey God’s command to sacrifice his son, and its substitution by an animal

Hajj – the pilgrimage to Makkah and associated rites that is compulsory for all Muslims who are fit and financially able to undertake at least once in their lifetime

Halal – means allowed or approved. While it applies to all areas of life, it is often referred to in relation to food – a practicing Muslim can only eat food which is halal – i.e. contains no animal products deriving from a creature that has not been killed in the prescribed manner, and must not contain alcohol

Halaqa – Islamic study circle

Hijab – used commonly to signify the headscarf worn by many Muslim women

Mosque – common name in English for the Muslim place of worship, more correctly known as Masjid (pl. Masajid)

Niqab – face veil worn by some Muslim women, often showing only the eyes

Ramadhan – Muslim holy month of fasting

APPENDIX 4: BIBLIOGRAPHY / FURTHER READING

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