

ISSUE DESCRIPTION

COMMITTEE United Nations Women

ISSUE Dealing with the Problem of Discrimination Against Muslim Women

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Introduction

Women's rights in Islam have been the subject of divisive discussions and heated disputes in both the Muslim and Western worlds. Yet in distinct ways, the two prevailing mainstream narratives have oppressed Muslim women. They experience the same injustices as other females (access to employment, gender pay gap, domestic, verbal and physical violence, etc.) but other elements like perceived religion or ethnicity makes, and had been making their situations worse for years. Muslim women are frequently stereotyped in the media and in public opinion as being repressed or dangerous, without being seen as active participants in their communities. News articles either make reference to violations of women's rights or utilize images of them, particularly when they are dressed in religious clothing, to support arguments that state Islam is a problem. Discrimination is often related to perceptions of their Muslimness, and especially their clothing. In most countries, Muslim women are the main targets of Islamophobic hate crime and speech, and violence, especially if they wear a headscarf.

For instance, confederates acting as Hijabis have applied for work at shops and restaurants as part of a field experiment. For the Hijabis, there was evidence of formal discrimination (job callbacks, permission to finish an application), interpersonal discrimination (reported negative, perceived interest), and low expectations to obtain employment offers. In addition, Hijabis had a lower chance of getting callbacks when there was little employee diversity as opposed to significant workforce diversity. Discussion is held regarding the implications of these findings for Hijabis and organizations.

Some political discourses use these stereotypical beliefs as justification for their claims that some forms of Islam are incompatible with European values. These preconceptions help to foster a hostile environment that encourages discrimination and violence.

Islam is utilized to oppress women, so it's important to connect with the faith to dispel myths and prejudices among those who support this oppression. Understanding Islam is crucial and freeing for Muslim women because the majority of them strive to live according to its teachings. In the Middle East, the spread of these alternate interpretations and alternative religious education may give Muslim women the resources they need to promote gender equality inside and through Islam. Islamic feminists and religious education must be a part of any gender

equality projects, and programs must assist Muslim women in their efforts to re-engage with the Qur'an.

Definition of Key Terms

- **Burqa** - also spelled burka, is a loose outer garment worn primarily by Muslim women. It covers the body and face, usually incorporating a mesh panel through which the wearer can see.
- **Niqab** - is a cloth that covers the face of a devout Muslim woman. Specifically, a niqab is worn below the eyes, covering the nose and mouth.
- **Hijab** - garment worn by some Muslim women to cover their hair.
- **Hijabi** - a woman wearing a Hijab
- **Qur'an** - the central religious text of Islam

General Overview

Ever since the terrorist attacks of the early 2000s, Muslim people overall are less likely to be accepted into society, and they face huge discrimination worldwide. Muslim women experience the same inequalities as other women, such as gender pay gap, violence, abuse and access to employment, but additionally, they also face the discrimination regarding their religion and ethnicity. In the media, Muslim women are often represented as either oppressed or dangerous. Their religion is referred to as something that violates women's rights, especially when showing their religious clothing. Muslim women's clothing is seen as a controversial symbol which emphasises the difference between Western and Muslim values. The headscarves and veils are also seen as a sign of backwardness representing the Islam, perceived as a long-standing threat to the West.

Politics also feed into these stereotypes, so as to argue the compatibility between European and Islam values. These stereotypes contribute greatly to discriminatory practices and violence against Islam women. In a lot of countries, these women are often the main targets of Islamophobic hate crimes and violence, especially wearing their religious clothes such as niqab or hijab. Studies in 2014-2015 showed that in some European countries like France and the Netherlands, over 80-90% of islamophobic incidents were committed against Muslim women wearing a religious symbol.

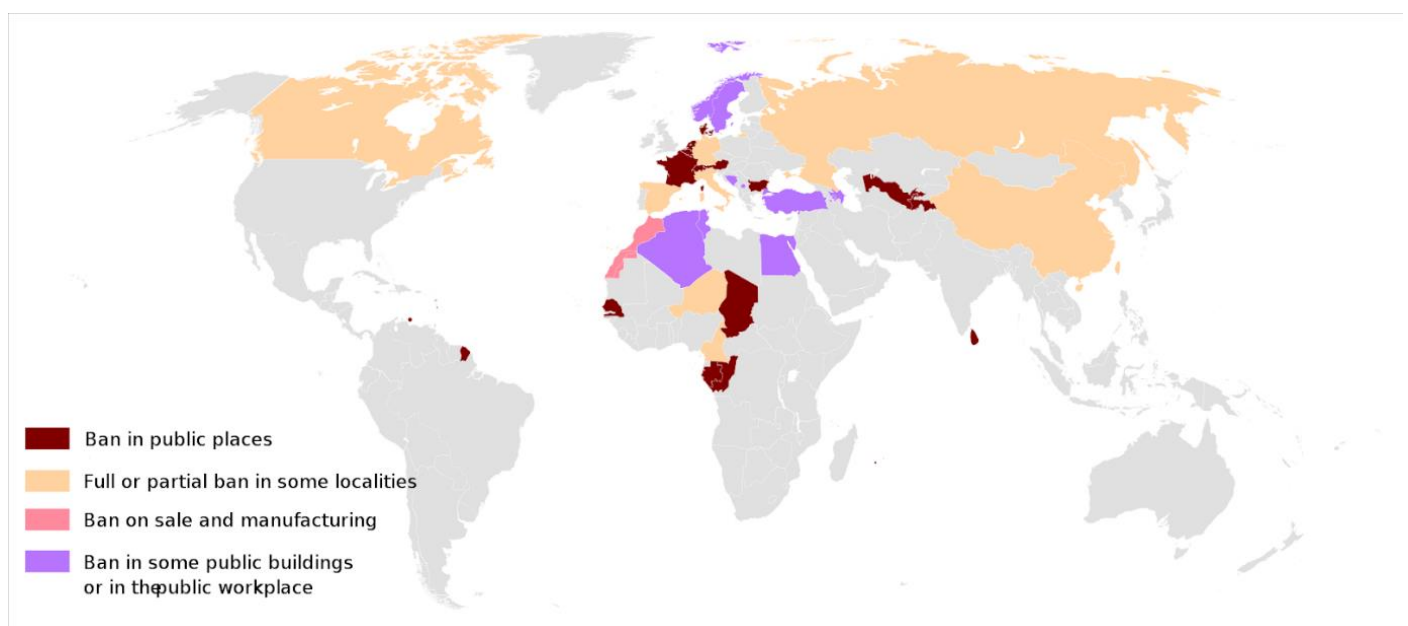
Muslim women are also discriminated against in the workforce. They are subject to different types of penalties, but those regarding their ethnicity and religion is different from the

discrimination that non-Muslim women experience. There are several studies addressing the discrimination that Hijabis face during a hiring process. There is evidence for formal discrimination (for example in job callbacks and permissions to complete application) and interpersonal discrimination such as perceived negativity and interest. The studies show that Hijabis were less likely to receive job offers and call backs in cases when there was a low employee diversity.

In addition, customer discrimination also has a role in the inequality in the workforce. Customer discrimination is when a share of customers do not want to interact with minorities such as Muslim women. This causes employers not to hire minority candidates for positions that require face-to-face contact with customers. Even though any minority can be an object to customer-driven discrimination, visible minorities are more exposed to this kind of inequality based on their accents or clothing, such as the hijab.

Unfortunately, Islam women face discrimination in both Islamic and non-Islamic countries, both often connected to their obligations to dress according to their religion and cover their head and body. In Islamic countries, they are forced to wear a headscarf by laws that fit the country's own understanding and interpretation of Islam.

In contrast, in non-Islamic countries, veils and religious clothing are a subject of political debates and security concerns. As a complete opposite of what they are forced to do in Islam regions, countries such as France are banning wearing religious clothes like burqa and niqab in public spaces. Both these acts are showing that people think they need to regulate Muslim women's bodies as if they were unable to do that for themselves, denying their ability to think and act independently.



Major Parties Involved

- **US** - Muslim women have every right to practise their religion. They are protected by law from discrimination because of their religion and ethnicity. The Constitution bars state governments from making rules prohibiting wearing hijab or other religious clothes.
- **UK** - Although there are legislations in place for discrimination in the labour market, the laws are not always efficiently protecting Muslim women. The United Kingdom offers a level of freedom in terms of practising religion.
- **France** - Even though the French Constitution guarantees fundamental rights like equality and religious freedom, in 2010 an act had been passed prohibiting Muslim women from wearing religious garments such as hijab in public spaces.
- **Netherlands** - The discrimination against Muslim women in the workforce is at a high level, especially in jobs requiring face-to-face contact with people.
- **Switzerland** - In 2021, the government banned wearing religious body covers in public spaces. Researches also showed that Switzerland has an employment gap similar to other European countries.
- **Belgium** - Belgium is part of the project “Forgotten Women: The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Women”. Restrictions on the wearing of religious symbols and clothing in the public sector exist due to the interpretation of the constitutional principle of neutrality, even though this principle only refers to education in the Constitution. Despite some proposals to extend the ban to the entire country, the prohibition is not harmonised at the federal level.

Timeline of Events

1998 - The Human Rights Act is enacted

2016 - a ban on wearing face-covering clothes in public was adopted by the Bulgarian Parliament

2017 - a legal ban on face-covering clothing was adopted by the Austrian government

2018 - The Norwegian government bans burqa and niqab in schools and universities

August 2019 - A new law banning all face coverings on public transport, in hospitals, town halls and educational institutions was implemented in 7 countries

2021 - Switzerland bans wearing burqa or niqab in public

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

European Network Against Racism (ENAR) - In order to effectively address the intersectional prejudice affecting Muslim women, the project studies the unreasonable effect of Islamophobia on women and attempts to create alliances between the anti-racism and feminist organizations.

European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) - ECRI's guidelines for combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims offer governments practical recommendations that can foster awareness and tolerance. Muslim women may suffer from multiple discrimination – on grounds of gender and religion as well as ethnic origin – making them a particularly vulnerable group, and governments should therefore pay special attention to their situation.

Forgotten Women: The Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Women - This project aims to document the disproportionate effect of Islamophobia on women and develop alliances between the anti-racism and feminist movements in order to better address the intersectional discrimination affecting Muslim women. The project took place in 8 countries, chosen to get a representative picture of the situation of Muslim women in the European Union: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

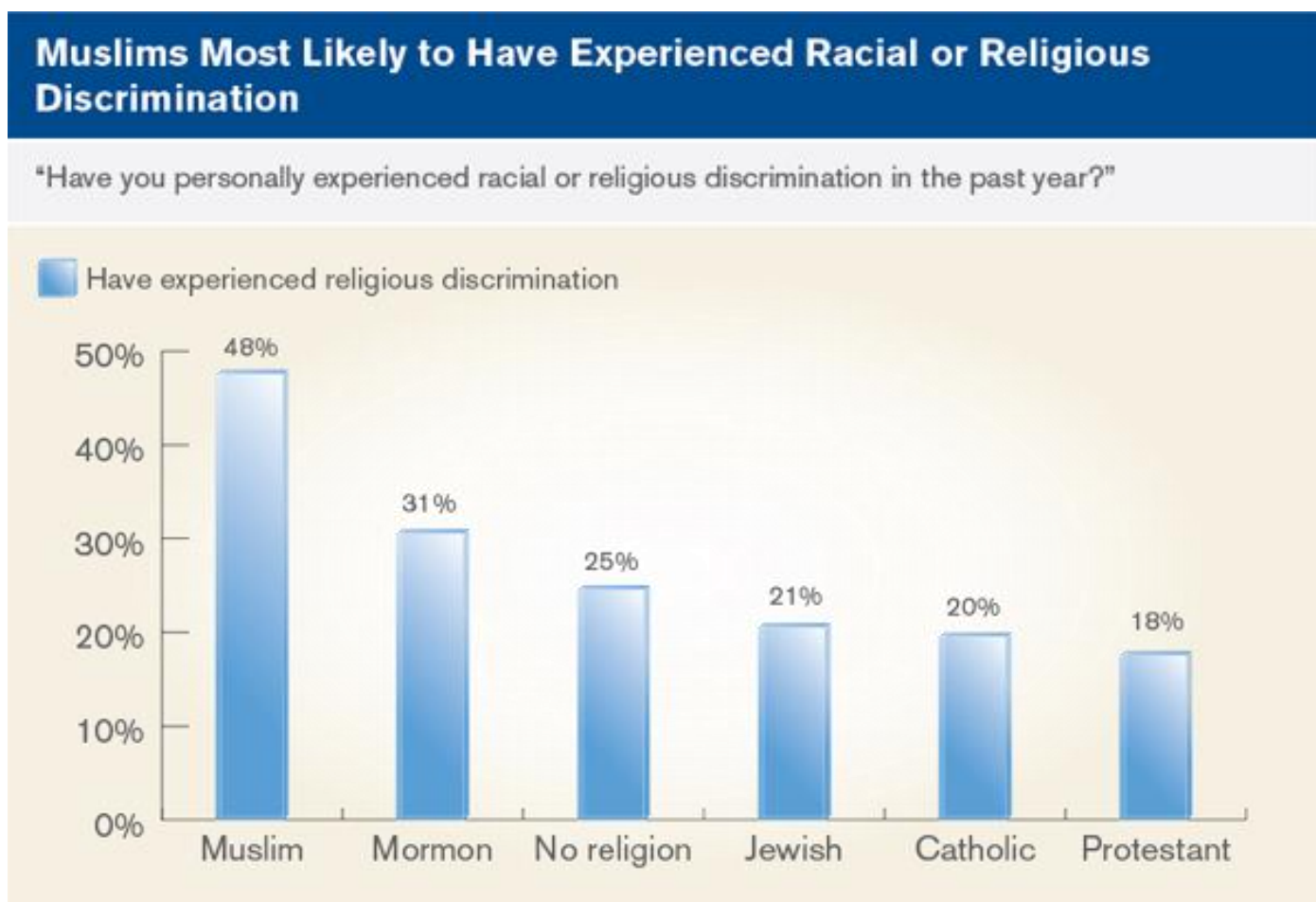
BETTER EDUCATION ABOUT ISLAMIC RELIGION

Many people fear and distrust concepts and ideas they do not fully understand. What people fear of, they judge as evil; what they judge as evil, they try to control. Providing better education and understanding about the Islamic religion would help people learn and respect other cultures' behaviour and choices. The realities of the modern world significantly contribute to communication between representatives of different cultures. This can often lead to conflicts, including those that arise on religious grounds. Therefore, different religions and their views must be understood and studied to interact with each other adequately to avoid such confusions in the future.

DISCOURAGE THE CONFLATION OF ISLAM WITH VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Over the years, the words "Muslim" and "Islam" have gained a negative connotation, which often carries dangerous and threatening undertones. This is mostly due to the terrorist attacks committed by religious extremists on the 11th of September in 2001. Ever since then, Muslims have been often compared to terrorists and faced discrimination and prejudice merely because of their religion. According to an American survey made in 2010, Muslims – especially women –

are 48% more likely to have experienced racial or religious discrimination than any other major religious groups.



PREVENTING SOCIAL HOSTILITIES TOWARDS MUSLIM WOMEN

Over the decade from 2012 to 2022, government restrictions on Islamic religion – laws, policies and actions by state officials that restrict religious beliefs and practices – increased markedly around the world. One category of social hostilities has increased substantially – hostilities related to religious norms (for example, harassment of women for violating religious dress codes) – driving much of the overall rise in social hostilities involving religion. Wearing Niqab or Burqa is restricted in some countries because they conceal the identity of a person. Those who still chose to wear such a garment have to pay a fine. Where there are no restrictions on clothing, Muslim women often face discrimination based on preconceptions and biased information.

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