

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTI-MUSLIM HATRED IN NORTH EAST ENGLAND

A REPORT BY PETER HOPKINS, JOHN CLAYTON AND TELL MAMA.



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1. Introduction

Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred represent an ongoing and growing challenge in the North East of England. In 2019, the Bahr Academy, based in Elswick, Newcastle upon Tyne, was subject to Islamophobic crime on three occasions: in January (Knight, 2019), March (BBC, 2019) and May (Busby, 2019). In the North East's three police force areas, the recorded number of hate crime/incidents totalled 4,184 in 2017/18 and 4,390 in 2018/19, showing a percentage increase of 5.83% (Home Office, 2019). The interim report for 2018 (January–June) from Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) recorded 52 incidents in the North East (however this includes the Yorkshire and Humber region, unlike in 2017) (Tell MAMA, 2018a). Furthermore, Hope Not Hate (2019) recorded nine far-Right demonstrations in the North East in 2018 – two each in Newcastle and Middlesbrough, and five in Sunderland – the most in the United Kingdom.

Home Office data (2019) reveal that the three police force areas covering the North East rank nationally (among the 42 police forces in England and Wales) somewhat highly for recorded racially and religiously aggravated hate crime. For racially aggravated hate crime, Cleveland Police ranked eleventh (2018/19) and was eighth in 2017/18, while Durham Police ranked fifteenth (2018/19) and ninth the previous year. Northumbria Police ranked highly for both racially aggravated (tenth in 2018/19 and ninth in 2017/18) and religiously aggravated hate crime (fifth in 2018/19 and fourth in 2017/18). The evidence suggests that the North East of England needs to take seriously the issue of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred.

This report explores the findings from an online survey on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in North East England (111 respondents) and two focus groups with Muslim residents. To undertake the survey and focus groups, its authors collaborated with Tell MAMA. In the context of this report, the North East region refers to the three police force areas of Cleveland, Durham and Northumbria.

2. North East studies of racism and Islamophobia

While the presence in the North East of minority ethnic communities has a much longer history than is often assumed (Nayak, 2003), the 2011 Census data demonstrate that this region had the highest percentage of White British people of all regions of England and Wales, at 93.6%, while its percentage of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people was 4.7%, compared to 14.1% of the total population of England and Wales (ONS Census, 2011a). The greatest proportions of people of minority ethnic backgrounds in the North East were in the local authorities of Newcastle (14.7%) and Middlesbrough (12%). The 2011 Census also reveals that the North East has a significantly higher average of people identifying as Christians (67.5%) than the national average of 59.3%, while those who identified as Muslim equated to 1.8% of the region's population, a demonstrably lower percentage than the national average of 4.8% (ONS Census, 2011b). In addition, the region contains some of the most deprived local authorities in the country and has been disproportionately affected by austerity and uneven development more generally (Anderson et al., 2019). As the Runnymede Trust (2019) points out, towns and cities in the region display deep racial and ethnic inequalities.

Working with ARCH, a third-party reporting agency in the North East, Clayton et al. (2016) explored hate crimes/incidents across the protected strands of race/religion, sexuality, disability, and transgender identities in Newcastle (2005-15) and Sunderland (2009-12). Incidents motivated by 'race' and religion made up the largest proportion of reports (82%). Of such incidents reported to ARCH, 36.3% had not been reported to Northumbria Police. Across strands, the majority of incidents fell under either 'offensive/abusive language' and 'coercive/threatening behaviour', although in the category of 'race/religion' there was greater evidence of more overtly violent offences such as 'material and criminal damage'. Furthermore, Clayton et al (2016) examined the distribution of race and religion based incidents between and within the two cities, showing concentrations in some areas of higher economic deprivation. However, they consider both the shifting ways in which incidents are recorded in the context of changing legislation and austerity, but also how they are experienced in relation to wider politics of 'race' and racism.

Working with BME voluntary and community groups across Tyne and Wear, 67% of which had reported a racist incident, Nayak (2006) has demonstrated the value of race equality organisations in the region. Responding to the apparent political consensus on the death of multiculturalism at the start of the decade, Nayak's later work (2012) with such groups again reported instances of neighbourhood racism and the early impact of austerity on their efforts, echoing Clayton et al.'s (2016) work on the impact of austerity on ARCH. More recently, Bowler and Razak (2019), in the context of Sunderland, reinforce the crucial role of anti-racist and critical multicultural youth work in challenging xeno-racist assumptions.

Finlay et al. (2020) have found racism and Islamophobia to be significant concerns for youth in Sunderland, with racist incidents being a regular topic of discussion among young people from diverse backgrounds. Nayak's (2017) more recent work, also in Sunderland, specifically explores the experiences of British Bangladeshi Muslim young women. While everyday experiences of racism shape belonging at multiple scales, the young women in the study maintained an affiliation with their local space and demonstrated resistance in the face of racist encounters.

Although most research has concentrated on experiences within Newcastle and Sunderland, such studies lay bare deep-seated and stubborn cultures of racism, including Islamophobia, across the North East. This report contributes to this picture and while sensitive to geographic variation, contests interpretations of regional exceptionalism.

3. Our study

The survey ran from late October 2019 to early February 2020, and 111 people completed it, 56.8% of whom were female and 39.6% male (3.6% did not state their gender). Of these respondents, 32 were Muslim women. 64.9% of survey respondents were from the Newcastle area, 17.1% were from Sunderland, 10.8% from Durham and 6.3% from Teesside. The respondents' age ranged from 16 to 71. 79.3% of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 55.

Almost half (46%) identified as Muslim (51), 18.9% as of no faith and 16.2% as Christian. The remainder identified with a range of other faiths or did not state their faith. Almost one-quarter (24.3%) of respondents identified as White British and 9.9% as White. Two Muslim respondents identified as White British. The largest identifiable 'non-White' groups were Pakistani (8.1%) and British Pakistani (8.1%). Three Muslim respondents did not state their ethnicity.

We conducted two focus groups in Newcastle upon Tyne, one with 11 Muslim women and one with two Muslim men.

4. A worsening situation?

The survey responses indicated a recognition of the positive aspects of community relations in the region. Participants conveyed a strong desire to live in peace and harmony. While some recognised a growing sense of tolerance, there was a broader recognition both that things are worsening and that it is challenging to speak out against racism. A clear majority (74.5%) of Muslim respondents indicated that Islamophobia is 'getting worse'.

To account for the worsening Islamophobia, there was mention of the rise of far-Right politicians (both mainstream and fringe figures), as well as Brexit (the North-East voted to leave, with 58% of the vote: only Newcastle voted to remain) and the role of news and social media in emboldening and normalising acts of racism, including attacks on individuals and mosques. Reference was made to international and national politics, the visibility of far-Right groups and the weak reaction of some politicians in local areas. In general, rather than focusing on its lived consequences, non-Muslim respondents tried to make sense of what is driving Islamophobia.

5. Direct experiences of Islamophobia

Almost one-third (27.5%) of Muslims and one-third (33.3%) of non-Muslims indicated that experiences of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred are a daily occurrence: overall, 67.5% of respondents indicated either a 'regular' or a 'daily' occurrence. Asked if they had directly experienced Islamophobia, a clear majority of Muslim respondents agreed (84.3%): only one female Muslim respondent answered 'No'. One-third (33.3%) of non-Muslim respondents indicated that they had directly experienced Islamophobia. This was due to 'misidentification' as Muslim (Jhutti-Johal & Singh, 2019) or witnessing others being targeted due to presumed Muslim identity. Some also indicated that they had been attacked in defence of others.

When asked about their most recent direct experience, respondents identified 129 incident types (more than one each): 34 respondents overall (30.6%) and 50% of female Muslim respondents had experienced multiple types of Islamophobia in that most recent experience. Overall, these 'types' included verbal abuse (40.3% overall; 44.1% for Muslim respondents; and 86.7% for female Muslim respondents), harassment and intimidation (18.6% overall; 25% for Muslim respondents; and 46.6% for female Muslim respondents) and online abuse (15.5% overall, with a higher proportion of non-Muslims at 24.4%). Incidents which fell into the category 'other' point to the importance of the non-verbal and non-physical (Nayak, 2011) – of being made to feel inferior, avoided and/or maltreated without explicit use of racist language or action.

Most experiences (76.7% overall and 80.9% for Muslim respondents) involved individuals unknown to the respondent. In instances when the perpetrator was known, they included neighbours, colleagues, friends of friends, and students at the school where the respondent worked. A significant minority (8.2%) declined to state if they knew the perpetrator(s), suggesting that the proportion of 'known offenders' may actually be higher.

Of the Muslim respondents, 90.2% knew friends and family who had experienced Islamophobia and the majority of recent incidents, 91.4% (64 of 70), had involved verbal abuse, while 34.3% (24 of 70) had involved harassment or intimidation. The most common locations for friends and family to experience Islamophobic incidents were public areas (37.3%) and public buildings (19%). Public transport (12.7%) and workplaces (11.1%) were also important spaces.

The following sections give examples of the forms and types of Islamophobia experienced by those who participated in this study.

5.1 Attacks on motor vehicles and while driving

Two participants in the Newcastle Muslim women's group described incidents of attacks on, and the theft of, a car, highlighting the gendered aspects of the Islamophobia mentioned above, as well as geographic variation in perceptions and experiences:

This happened to one of my friends. She was driving down the Nuns Moor Road, it's not very far from here. There was this car coming from the opposite direction. She wears a head-covering and she covers her face. She was actually driving the car and this car coming from the opposite direction, he rolled down his window and he threw some liquid on. Her window was up, it was closed, but he did that. It could have been anything, that liquid. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

It's sad. I have a friend, she lives in Whitley Bay and she's like the sister, and she said, "I put my niqab on when I come to Newcastle but, when I'm in Whitley Bay, if I put my niqab on I wouldn't be able to get out of the house." She's that fearful. We do fear for our lives. I mean, I was a victim of car hijack because I was wearing a hijab. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

5.2 Attacks on mosques and religious buildings

Beyond the damage resulting to buildings and property, attacks on mosques constitute a separate form of religiously motivated attack:

There was an attack on Bangladesh... it was a Bangladeshi mosque. It was a really bad one, where they had really made a mess. It was reported in the news and everywhere.

Well, we've had some graffiti, but not major. We've had some bricks chucked at the camera, so there are cracked lenses in some places, but we just got more cameras to replace those ones. (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

5.3 Verbal abuse

Participants discussed being verbally abused at work and in other everyday spaces. This extended quote from a taxi driver is an illustrative example, where the demands of work throw individuals into unwanted racist encounters:

No disrespect. I've been a taxi driver for 30 years. I don't physically drive anymore but I get guys in the back of the car and normally I ignore it, but sometimes it just gets on your wick...

I took a couple to Birtley and he goes, I think he was talking about his dad doesn't like Muslims. I go, "Well then, he's a racist, isn't he?" I go, "Why don't you like Muslims?" – "Well, they're all terrorists." This was about 9/11 time. I go, "Because they're all

terrorists? Okay. Do you like the Irish?" "Yes. I've got no problem with the Irish." I go, "You'll find the Irish have killed more British than any Muslims killed." His girlfriend agreed with me. She goes, "Yes, darling, you're a racist." What am I doing, educating the British public? I'm a nobody. Honestly, you just get fed up with it. I don't even watch the news anymore. I'd rather watch *Tom & Jerry* or something else. It's all bullshit, "Can you put a nice cartoon on, please?" (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

This verbal abuse has often made problematic connections between terrorist incidents and people perceived to be Muslim (see later section on education and public services). Participants also discussed hearing or overhearing Islamophobic and racist language and comments that were not directed at them, as such, but as part of daily life and everyday discourse:

Also, I experienced when I went to a charity shop, sometimes I go there just to look for things. Once when I went there, I knew what they were talking about, the present issue and everything about the Muslims and everything. A couple of them, over the counter, they were just talking about it. As soon as I went there, they didn't stop straight away but, after a couple of minutes, they were just telling each other, "Someone is here, we better stop now," so then they stopped. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

5.4 Assumptions about immigration status and literacy

Several focus group participants referred to being asked where they were from, due to people's assumption that they were immigrants and belonged elsewhere. Moreover, some discussed their experiences of people who assumed that they did not speak English or had limited literacy:

I do speak English, you know. Actually, they think you don't understand them because you wear this attire. They think you're actually stupid when you start speaking to them, "You speak English?" "Yes, I was born and bred here, love." It's like that. So, it boils down to ignorance.

I've had that. There was an oldish guy sitting next to me on the bus and then, just like that, he was there, and I sat right next to him, "Oh, so where are you from?" and I'm like, "I'm from the UK. "No, where are you from?" "Yes, I am from... I was born and bred here." I think he was getting very agitated that I wasn't answering his question but, "Love, I'm from the UK. You can't change that." (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

5.5 Dehumanisation

Some of the everyday Islamophobia included concerning experiences in which Muslims were made to feel worse than 'second-class citizens':

It's just unfortunate that, unfortunately, Muslims are all second-class citizens. Actually, not even second class. They're somewhere in the class of the dogs and the animal section. You can kick a Muslim, he's an animal. It's all right, he's fine. It's just so sad that Islamophobia has put us there. (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

We are made to feel that we're not part of this society, we don't have any rights, you're not even a human being when you can dress like that. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

5.6 Looks, glances and stares

Participants also discussed how hostile looks, fixed staring and other forms of seeing and looking were ways in which Islamophobia was manifested in everyday life (Nayak, 2011):

I was just passing each shop and you could tell that they are looking at you in a horrible way. Some of them will say a few things, but you don't understand what they're saying to you. I quickly just pass by. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

This man was pushing a trolley at one of the Asda supermarkets. I was taking a trolley out of the lot and he was trying to push the trolley into me. I just stood there looking at him, and then he changed his route and went. Because I stood there and he couldn't go because there was no space, try to be sensible. Then he kept staring at me. He was going up the escalators and he kept looking at me all that while. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

6. Where and when do these incidents occur?

In line with UK-wide reports by Tell MAMA (2016, 2017, 2018a, 2019), public spaces were held to be the most frequent location of Islamophobic and anti-Muslim incidents. The survey results indicate that direct experiences of anti-Muslim hatred take place on the streets (34%), in public buildings (21%) and on public transport (16.8%). This includes experiences in car parks, on the pavement, in supermarkets, while waiting for the bus and in related locations.

Participants mentioned different times that Islamophobia occurred. Some emphasised that it was something that happens all the time and pointed to being always at risk, whereas others suggested that it was more likely to happen after dark or in winter, when there is less light.

Consider the experiences of these focus group participants:

I was just passing each shop and you could tell that they are looking at you in a horrible way. Some of them will say a few things but you don't understand what they're saying to you. I quickly just pass by. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

She went to Morrisons one day and she was abused in the car park by a customer. She entered Morrisons and then she was abused by the worker, the employee there, just in a matter of half an hour or so. So it is that high, the frequency of this hate crime. So, I think really the government needs to do something about it, especially the politicians should stop commenting about anti-hatred statements without even thinking about what impact it would have on the common people. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

This lady went to Waitrose one day with her husband, shopping, her grocery shopping. This very old lady, probably in her 70s or more than that, I don't know, she came up to her husband and said, "You have no right to keep that woman like that." I don't know what she heard, what she saw. He went, like, "What did I do to you?" Then they just walked away. They didn't know what to tell her. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

Prospect Medical Group, just across the road here. I went in. I had two guys stand behind me, I think they had mental health, ill-health issues, or something like that. They said, "We're not standing behind this smelly Paki." Honestly, my first thing was...

You should have just said, "I smell a lot better than you two."

To get a reaction I just went... I looked at them and I said, "Did everybody hear what they said?" The patients were seated on my right and the receptionist, they all went like this, deadly silent, not a pin could have been heard, dropped. I sat there for 10 to 15 minutes, waiting to see my GP, and my blood was boiling. I wanted to get up and

do a song and a dance about it to say, "How would you like it if it happened to you? How would you react?", to have a little bit of action there and then. But I just was so angry. So, when I went and saw my GP, I burst into tears. I started crying, saying that... (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

I wouldn't dream of going out on my own. Waiting at a bus stop is a complete no-no. Driving is essential for practising identifiable Muslim women. It's not a choice. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

Public transport – including buses as well as taxis – was frequently raised as a location where anti-Muslim acts are experienced. Bus travel was highlighted as a significant site of 'differentiation and exclusion' (Wilson, 2011).

Buses are notorious places where such things happen. One of my doctor friends was travelling on the bus. She got on the bus, she looked around and there was a place next to this lady, and she went and sat beside her. Then she said, "Not again". That was the response from the lady who was sitting there. So, she confronted. She is not that kind of a person who would confront people. She confronted her and she said, "What did you say?" and she said, "No, I was just talking about something, the day," or something, she said. She tried to change the topic. She said, "Well, I heard you, what you said, and that's not very nice." She just kept quiet. Everybody on the bus started to look at the incident that was happening, nobody said anything. She got down off the bus and she called me, and she was literally crying. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

Although many respondents referred to driving their own or the family car to minimise the risk of experiencing Islamophobia, private transport had brought some of them into conflict with other drivers:

They also have this thing in mind that we don't know anything, we are just dumb people. I was driving in the Metro Centre Debenhams car park on the ground floor. It is one way. So, I was driving and then there was this other car who'd just come head-on. Then that lady points to me like that and says, like, this, so I just sat in my car and then I just pointed on top of the... there was this one blue arrow. I pointed her to that, and that's when she realised that she was wrong, not I. She reversed the car. But initially, the first... (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

Furthermore, the majority of Muslim participants (70.6%) and female Muslim participants (80%) fear the experience of Islamophobia. Only two female participants had no fear of it. The fears were wide-ranging and included anxieties about being physically and/or verbally attacked or hearing that someone they know had been attacked (the public nature of this was emphasised, as was the lack of safety in public). Concerns were expressed about its

implications for their self-confidence and sense of belonging, as well as its being an obstacle to employment. Some respondents were worried about its impact on family members, especially concerned for children at school and those attending mosques. Some fears were about people glaring at or confronting them or them “feeling threatened in my city”. Participants felt that they were often blamed for atrocities and that there were no consequences for the perpetrators. Some also felt that, should they experience Islamophobia, no one was willing to defend them, as examples given above suggest.

7. Who is at risk? Gendered Islamophobia

Over half (60.4%) of respondents indicated that women are at greater risk of Islamophobia (higher for Muslim respondents, at 66.7%). Much research has focused on the issue of gendered Islamophobia and the increased likelihood of Muslim women experiencing racism and Islamophobia compared to men (e.g. Hopkins, 2016; Finlay & Hopkins, 2019; Tell MAMA, 2018a). Overall, 33.3% thought both men and women are equally at risk and a much lower proportion thought men are more at risk (6.3% overall). Those of Arab (35.3% of responses) and South Asian (28.5% of responses) ethnicity were regarded as being most at risk. Muslim respondents were more likely to suggest that all Muslims, regardless of ethnicity, were at risk (18.6% of responses) than non-Muslims did (3.3% of responses). Wearing headscarves (94.6%; 100% of Muslim respondents), having a beard (64%; 76.5% of Muslim respondents), wearing clothes associated with Islam (89.2%; 94.1% of Muslim respondents), wearing a turban (64%), having brown skin (80.2%) and attending a mosque (68.5%) were all seen to put people at greater risk. Although the majority of respondents (52.3%) felt that all age groups were at equal risk, almost one-third (29.7%) felt that those of working age were more likely to be at risk. The profile of a person most at risk was felt to be a woman of any age, of Arab or South Asian ethnicity, with brown skin and wearing a headscarf and other identifiably religious/ethnic minority clothing.

It was clear from the focus groups that Islamophobia is a gendered phenomenon and that Muslim women – and other women who could be mistaken for Muslims (Hopkins et al., 2017) – were most at risk. Focus group participants openly discussed the ways that Islamophobia is experienced more frequently and more severely by women:

Do you think it's different for Muslim women compared to Muslim men?

It's a lot worse for Muslim women.... For a woman, they're easy targets, they've got a scarf on, they can see them a mile away... (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

Participants discussed several ways in which Islamophobia is gendered.

First, women discussed being targeted because of distinctive aspects of their dress, particularly headscarves:

We were walking the street where the traffic lights, and the car needed to slow down. I had my hijab this time and I was walking and looking at the cars on the side. You cannot believe it but I could read, from one woman's face, what she was saying to her husband, "What the F Muslim doing here?" and looked at me in a very bad way to my eyes. I felt the hatred of the woman in my eyes. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

Second, participants discussed the assumption that Islam oppresses women and that Muslim women are similarly oppressed by their husbands and wider Muslim society. Many participants used counterexamples to overturn this problematic stereotype:

The other huge issue we have is that these are educated people that think that even Muslim women are oppressed... they don't even realise that education is valued so much in our faith that girls are pushed towards education. There's more women educated in Islam than there are men, if you look at it statistically. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

Third, Muslim women challenged sexist assumptions about the gendered division of labour in Muslim households, as they felt this was a stereotype that reinforced the assumption that they are oppressed:

But again, it's defined in Islam. If you study Islam, go by the Quran and the teachings of the prophet Mohammed, it's clearly mentioned, the women have been assigned such and such duties. The men have been assigned. So, the division is equal. What we are doing here is, we are trying to say, "If a woman is managing the house, she is looked down upon" but actually she is not. It's her house and she's doing it, whereas her husband is working out day and night and earning so much money and bringing it in. So, she's looking after the mental, physical and social wellbeing of the house, whereas he's taking care of the financial wellbeing of the house. So, there is no... it is shared work. It's not a competition. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

8. The impact of Islamophobia

From the perspective of Muslim respondents, Islamophobia results in their mistreatment, being subjected to verbal abuse and physical violence. Clear majorities of Muslim respondents (76.5%) and 83.3% of female Muslim respondents felt that Islamophobia has an adverse impact on employment opportunities (64% overall). Just over half (54.9%) of Muslim respondents and 70% of female Muslim respondents felt that Islamophobia had an adverse impact on access to public services (54.1% overall). Many referred to being viewed as strangers (often related to their clothing) and experiencing feelings of fear, isolation, exclusion and immobility. In this sense, Islamophobia damages community relations and threatens the life chances of those who experience it or are worried about experiencing it. Some of these problems are explicit and some more subtle or concealed, speaking to the structural and entrenched nature of racism and discrimination in society (Khan, 2020).

More than half the Muslim respondents (56.9%) and 56.7% of female Muslim respondents had altered their behaviour because of Islamophobia, particularly their appearance, awareness and mobility. In addition, there were comments relating to broader consequences, such as mistrust of authority and the respondents themselves downplaying Islamophobia as an issue, due either to a lack of knowledge or failure to recognise the problem (although these were very small numbers).

Tables 1 and 2 outline the ways in which Muslim and non-Muslim respondents changed their behaviours in response to Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred.

Table 1 - Behavioural changes in everyday life for Muslims in North East England

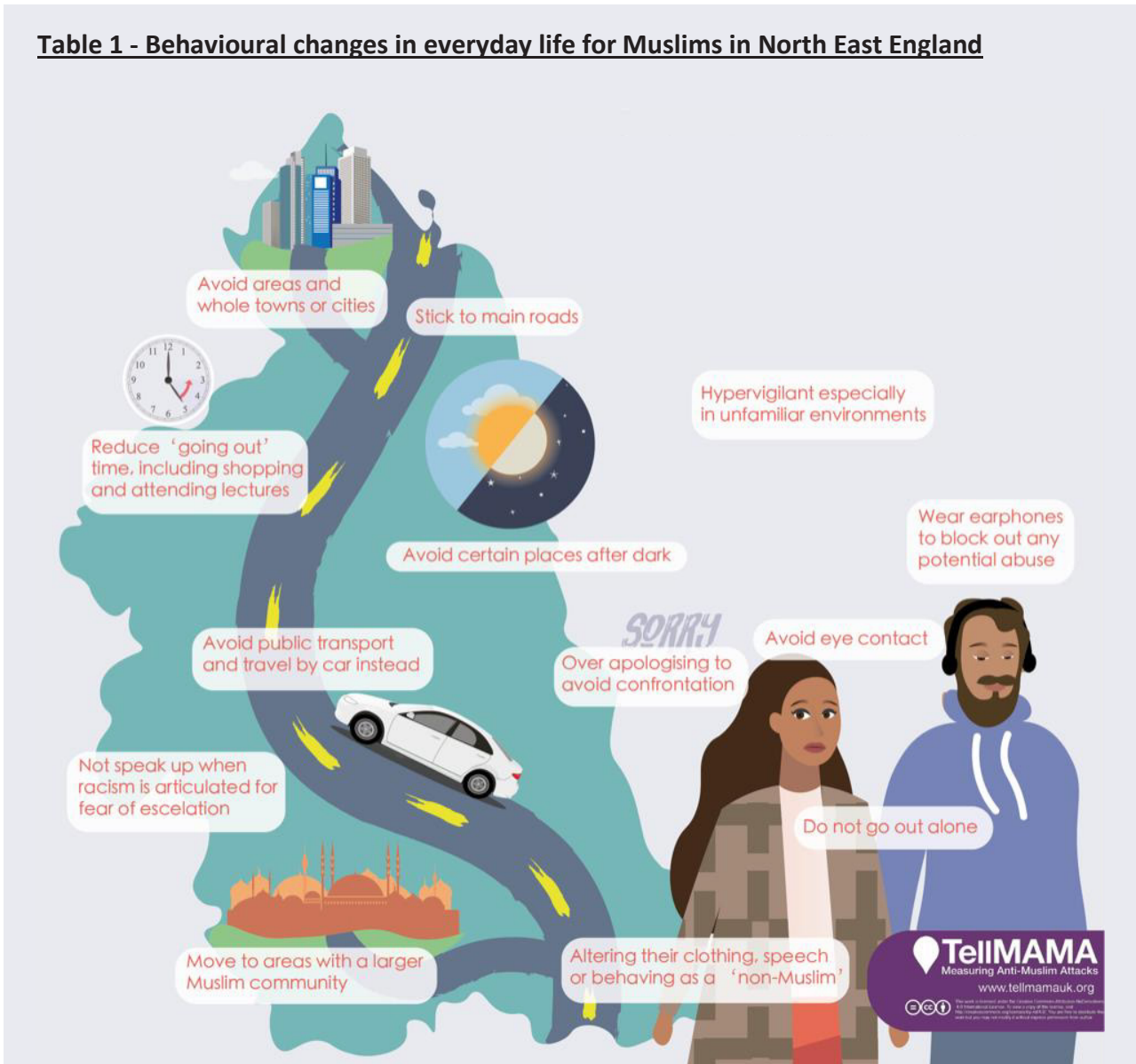


Table 2 - Examples of changes in behaviour by non-Muslims

Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred also have an impact beyond the Muslim community, as other ethnic or religious minority groups suffer if they are perceived to be Muslim. Some 26.7% of non-Muslim respondents (or those not indicating their faith) had altered their behaviour. The responses relate to how they react in countering Islamophobia, relating experiences of Muslims whom they know, but also issues of misidentification as Muslim.

- Challenging ideas and addressing discrimination in everyday life
- Being more aware, looking out for signs
- Avoiding certain places on a night out
- Carrying a knife for protection for a while after an incident with a Muslim friend in Sunderland
- Challenging students
- Educating friends and family
- Avoiding people displaying Islamophobic behaviours
- Maintaining vigilance and sitting near to Muslim women on public transport, to intervene if necessary
- Joining an anti-racist organisation
- Promoting inclusive activities in the community
- Being more careful about how to behave in company of Muslims
- Adjusting clothing – rarely wearing a turban/headscarf.

9. Employment and the workplace

The survey responses and the focus group discussions described Islamophobic abuse in the workplace. One participant, who identified as a taxi driver, described a specific incident that was representative of his broader experience:

I remember this guy, where did I drop him off, in South Shields. He had a lovely girlfriend with him and nobody to pick him up. He wouldn't get into a Paki's car. As it happens, I look quite White and I'm quite well spoken. He got into my car and he didn't realise I was Asian until I got over the Tyne Bridge. He's going, "Another fucking Paki", and I go, "Yes, mate, what's your problem?"; and "You all sign on the dole. You all screw the system, you do this". (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

A second participant described a similar experience in their work as a self-employed cleaner:

Can I say something? Because I converted to be Muslim. When I studied Muslim, I studied bullying by one of my clients. I am self-employed in cleaning people's house. I clean for lawyers and they are nice and friendly, but I was eating lunch with them and once, when I converted to Muslim, I didn't want to eat ham because it's pork. He said, "Don't tell me you trying to be Muslim." I said, "Yes, I do." From this day, he started bullying me every single day when I start coming to the house. He was like touching me by offering me something and telling me, "It's just a little pork". (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

A third participant discussed a less abusive but nonetheless upsetting experience when she decided to wear the hijab at work:

Like, before I started wearing the hijab, I was on and off with it. I'd always wear it on the weekends and stuff around you guys and things but, at work, I didn't. Then one day I thought, "I'm going to try it." Then she was, like, "If I didn't know you, I wouldn't feel comfortable with that." So that really hurt, so I didn't wear it. Then Natasha, amazing personality, dead rough, dead broad Geordie and she was, like, "Yes, man!" Didn't care about what anyone else thinks. The type of clothes she wears is quite out there. I think it goes with her personality. She was, like, "You wear whatever you want to wear, don't care about them. The Muslim women, when they wear the hijab," she was, like, "I wish I looked that beautiful." She said, "You wear it" and then, after that, I started wearing it to work. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

In addition to overt instances of Islamophobic abuse at work, one participant described how Islamophobia has an adverse impact on employment opportunities. As noted previously, 76.5% of Muslim respondents and 83.3% of female Muslim respondents felt that

Islamophobia has an adverse impact on employment opportunities (overall 64%). Importantly, this participant suggested that there are troublesome knock-on effects:

There's more chance of... two lads going for a job and one is White called John Smith and the other one is called Adam Mohammad – there's more chance of that White lad getting that job than Adam Mohammad, not because he's any smarter or better or anything else but, unfortunately, he's called Adam Mohammad, which is not unfortunate but it's just unfortunate. So, unfortunately, we've got the highest unemployment rates in the west end of Newcastle.... The majority of them are young Asian Muslim kids that have got no aspirations, they've got nothing to look forward to in life. They're going to end up on drugs. They're going to end up on the streets. We bang the drum until we're red in the face. Nobody gives a shit, pardon the French. I'll go in front of community leaders, police commissioners. We'll sit around the table, we'll have tea and biscuits all day and they'll say, "What's your problems?" Hindu community is fine. They're all doing great. They've all got high-end jobs, they're doing great." (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

Yet, for some participants, the workplace was a space where Islamophobia and broader racism could be challenged:

At work, I've been subject to a few backhanded comments from my boss and it's got to the point now where I do stand up and shut her up, because when there was Brexit and how they were going to up the salary to £33,000 she said, "Oh well, I think they should." She was, like, "Why should they come here and then make money when they go back home and spend it there? They should put into our economy." I'm, like, "Excuse me." I was, like, "You have no idea how the immigration system works", because I'm about to go through it myself. I was, like, "There's so many roots to it and so many different levels of it. You have no idea." I was, like, "£33k? That's for people with professions of doctors, solicitors, all the high-ranking ones. Then you've got the family. Then you've got the asylum seekers. You have no idea how they go through it." I was, like, "For an application to bring my husband here it's, like, £3,000. If it fails, you don't get that money back. You have to reapply, and that's another £3,000."

I was, like, "The application process is £2,000 and then it's another £1,000 to pay the NHS sub choice." She went, "What's that?" I was, like, "We pay the NHS through our national insurance." I went, "People who come here, they've got to pay it straight away." I went, "They don't have an option. They've got to pay it straight away." (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

10. Education and public services

Schools and other public services were mentioned in several survey responses and focus group discussions. In the survey, 54.9% of Muslim respondents and 70% of female Muslim respondents felt that Islamophobia had an adverse impact on access to public services (54.1% overall). Some discussed how children were subjected to racist bullying at school:

Yes, just recently from my younger sister... so she was telling me, "Some boys are abusing me in my class. They're touching my scarf. I don't want to go to school." She was crying the whole way. So, we had to go to the teachers. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

The understanding of many participants was that children were learning these racist ideas at home or on social media. Some concern was expressed about teachers failing to address these issues:

Our children are victims of Islamophobia, not only by the children but ignorance of the teachers as well, because we do educational dinners twice a month and we invite doctors, nurses, police, teachers, all of them. When we sit around the table and they ask questions... it's really shocking and mind-blowing to [see] how ignorant they are. So, the teachers need to take responsibility about knowing about religion, because it's a good mixture of religion... (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

I think schools have quite a lot to do with it as well, that it's not tackled in the way that it should be when the parents are going, "We haven't seen it. We haven't witnessed it" or "There isn't a problem" and it's just pushed under the carpet. Like, when bullying was a huge issue and a lot of schools were, like, "It doesn't happen in our school". It's the same thing with schools. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

Some focus group participants also felt that educational curricula should pay more attention to the contribution of Muslims to the United Kingdom, and many felt that schools could do more to address anti-Muslim hatred:

I think schools need to take a proactive approach. They should be doing more to what they are doing at the moment, because educating them at an early age will have a very lasting impact. I feel the children listen to the teachers more than their mums. So, if the teacher tells them, educates them, they would have that in their mind rather than... (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

Participants in the focus groups discussed the ways in which they thought Islamophobia was embedded in various institutions and public services, with specific reference to healthcare, social services and the probation service. Consider these examples:

If I'm experiencing any abuse, I should be able to go to a receptionist and say, "Some action should be taken up against them", but it's not recognised, because I experienced it at a GP surgery. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

I feel that once you're involved with the social services they don't care, or they don't try to understand that there is a religious aspect that they need to consider and they need to keep that in mind as well. It doesn't matter. It's what we say. It's our rules. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

11. Media and politics

There is a general agreement that the printed media (89.7%), broadcast media (82.5%) and social media (83.5%) increase Islamophobia. This was reflected strongly in the focus group discussions. Numerous participants discussed the negative representation of Muslims in the media. This mostly related to the media making an association between Muslims and terrorism, and the perceived biased nature of media reporting of terrorist incidents involving Muslims and non-Muslims:

I think what's happened is a lot more of society has become brainwashed because of the media and everything else. It's just become the norm. They keep repeating the same crap and rubbish, time and time again. I mean radicalisation, terrorist attack. A White guy goes around shooting people, it's not a terrorist attack, he's just a nutter. (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

While some participants did not distinguish between the various types of media (e.g. broadcast, print, social), others discussed the problems of each. Both local and national broadcast media were criticised by participants for being biased, for the disproportionate coverage given to far-Right groups and for not covering stories that might paint Muslims in a positive light. Social media were also discussed as a digital space within which Islamophobia fermented and circulated freely (Awan, 2014). Other participants touched upon the perceived relationships between them. One participant, for example, described a cycle whereby Islamophobia on social media is fuelled by the representation of Muslims and the migrant/refugee 'crisis' on broadcast television:

Then social media is saying, "Muslims are terrorists, it's a barbaric faith". They base those opinions on what they're just seeing on TV, their hatred around the frenzy of refugees and asylum seekers are coming and taking our jobs and we can't get an appointment at the doctors or we can't get that important operation because of them. That's all stirred up by the politicians and the media, and so on. I honestly get really, really upset that when I was growing up in the '80s we were dealing with racial discrimination and stuff like that. Being a brown person then was a sin, but being a Muslim now is a sin. Our children are feeling it. We're trying to protect them from that, that they're in a safe place, they're in a place where they should be protected and they shouldn't be exposed to that form of hate where they're coming home and saying, "I don't want to be a Muslim, because it's not nice being a Muslim." As an adult, I feel like that, "Oh my God". (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

In the data, the two broad themes about politics concern first how politicians and the political system fuel and legitimise Islamophobia, and second that far-Right political views have been increasingly normalised and emboldened in UK politics:

The problem we've got is because, where we are situated, our centre, our mosque, around there is obviously a council estate and you've got a high concentration of EDL [English Defence League] supporters. The leader of the EDL party lives next to the mosque, ironically. (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

12. Reporting Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred

Of the 63 (56.8%) respondents who had experienced Islamophobia, 33 (52.4%) had not reported it to anyone. More than one-third (38.5%) of reports were made to the police or a third-party organisation. Nearly half of respondents (44.2%) had reported incidents to family and friends, yet five of those who had done so also responded 'Did not report', therefore they did not regard this as 'reporting' in the same sense.

Only 22.6% of respondents had reported their experience of Islamophobia to the police. Those who had not gave diverse reasons, including not being taken seriously by the police. Consider this response:

That's the reason people would not go to the police. If the police at least give you feedback or if they come back to you and say, "We did try to investigate" or "We did try to do such and such", you feel that little bit confident to do it again or that someone has taken you seriously. Otherwise, it's, like, "What's the point? I reported it last time." They said, "What are we supposed to do about it?" So you don't go back. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

There was also a sense among some participants that reporting Islamophobia to the police would be a waste of police time.

It's, like, wasting their time. We tried to work with the Police and Crime Commissioner at the time. She was a feminist and wanted to work for women's movement. She basically did some good work around domestic violence and things like that. When we said to her, even if she got misogyny recognised as a hate crime, that would be a huge help for us women, sisters here. At least we could put it down that we were talked to because we're women. Her response was that North East Police cannot and will not be able to get their head around recognising misogyny, basically called the police force thick: that they were too thick. (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

Many expressed mistrust in the police or felt that their incident was too minor to warrant attention, that they lacked appropriate evidence or that the process would take too long. Some also lacked knowledge and understanding of how to report incidents and about what could be achieved by reporting. Some, however, did acknowledge that the police have a challenging role to fulfil:

I think they are on our side but the problem we've got is, like I say, we couldn't provide the evidence, hence the reason we put in for funding... (Newcastle Muslim women's group)

13. Challenging Islamophobia

Many participants in the survey and focus groups discussed how they worked to challenge Islamophobia through correcting misunderstandings, through community and activist work and through seeking to educate people about the true meaning of their religious faith. This is similar to other research on responses to racism and Islamophobia (e.g. Hopkins, 2014; Hopkins et al., 2017). Some participants referred to the need to undertake a “risk assessment”, whereby they would gauge the potential risk of the encounter to ascertain whether it was worth it. The following are two examples of how Muslims sought to engage positively with their local communities to better inform them about Islam and to challenge problematic stereotypes:

The amount of work we do, I mean we do charity events in Newcastle, we try to promote it, we go to the soup kitchen, we do all kinds of stuff, charity walks and charity collections. Whatever we can do, we'll do, but none of that ever gets reported. It was the same with... what really boiled my blood was the Palestinian atrocities and everything else. There were marches at the time, I think they killed about 2,000 Palestinians at one point. (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

We quite happily, as part of the mosque, go in and talk to the children. Last year, I think I did about four or five schools. This year I've done about ten schools, that I've been to talking to children about the basics of Islam, why do we wear a hijab, why do we wear a long dress, why do girls dress in a certain way, boys dress in a certain way and the meaning of prayer, and things like that. But children are coming and telling their parents that they don't want to be a Muslim anymore because, being a Muslim, you get called a terrorist. (Newcastle Muslim men's group)

There are further examples of Muslims directly challenging Islamophobia. In relation to the anti-Muslim public transport incident experienced by a focus group participant, another responded: "Well, you did the right thing. Not only that lady was taught a lesson but also everybody else on the bus now knows that you can talk, and you can stand up for yourself." Moreover, there were accounts of Muslims challenging supermarket staff and customers about racist and Islamophobic incidents; although they were often dissatisfied with the response of the supermarket staff, they felt empowered and emboldened by speaking out against the injustice.

14. Recommendations

The survey and focus group participants were asked what actions they thought should be taken to address the issues raised through this research. The main themes were:

- **Improved mainstream education and awareness about Muslims and Islam:** Educate both in and beyond schools and mainstream from an early age; educate those in powerful positions in society and public bodies, including public transport; widen understandings of both Muslim identities and of Britishness; and accommodate religious holidays to a greater extent.
- **Make the media and politicians more accountable for their words and deeds:** Break the connection between Islam and terrorism; promote policies to clamp down on negative media coverage, language and tone, notably where religion is irrelevant to the story; and strengthen counter-narratives on the contributions of Muslims to British society.
- **Address the failings of policing and the criminal justice system:** Stop the constant surveillance of Muslims; impose tougher penalties/consequences for anti-Muslim hatred, including time in the community; commit to a public inquiry into how police forces investigate hate crime; penalise social media companies when they fail to remove hateful content; and give more powers to stop racist marches.
- **Build bridges between communities:** Hold open days, community projects and sharing of food; allocate more funding for interfaith work.
- **Run public campaigns against Islamophobia:** Critique government policies that are deemed Islamophobic and the threat of the far-Right; publicise the support currently available for victims; and send strong messages from local decision-makers.
- **Funding:** Continue the good work that has been established.
- **Community-led action:** Those most directly in need should be involved in devising solutions and ways forward.

15. Summary

The North-East displays a combination of influences including: local histories, demographics, contemporary far-Right presence, community tensions and local activism; national political discourse and the media; and global geopolitics and the reach of social media. While some of the experiences outlined in this report are specific to the region (and specific places within the region), there is evidence of clear commonalities across the United Kingdom. Key summary points of this report are:

- There is a strong sense that Islamophobia is worsening in the region and that, despite (or because of) its unique characteristics, there is an urgent need to address this.
- Islamophobia and anti-Muslim attacks are experienced in multiple forms, some of which are overtly hostile and violent, while others are more subtle yet also damaging.
- Incidents overwhelmingly take place in public spaces and are perpetrated by strangers, but not in all cases.
- Islamophobia is recognised by participants as highly gendered, and those seen to be most at risk are women of any age, of Arabic or South Asian ethnicity, with brown skin and wearing a headscarf or other identifiably religious/ethnic minority clothing.
- Impacts are wide ranging and in various ways limit, constrain and influence everyday activities, as well as creating barriers to (and within) employment, education and public services.
- While some respondents have reported these incidents, there remain significant under-reporting and barriers to reporting, especially to the police.
- Participants are not experiencing Islamophobia passively. They are often actively involved in challenging and resisting these injustices, despite an absence of supportive structures to enable and encourage them to do so.

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