

**The Islamic College  
MA Islamic Studies**

*Muslim Women in Britain: Challenges faced in Education and Work*

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## Abstract

The position of Muslim women in society has been a subject of interest since the advent of Islam. The religion is seen as the liberator of women, who according to pre-Islamic Arab culture were seen as no more than commodities. Thus, Islam elevated the status of women in society, giving them dignity, honour and rights within the social, economical and political spheres; as a result they were able to fully participate in society. However, in recent times there has been much criticism towards the world-wide Muslim community, which is seen to oppress women and treat them as subordinates. Countries like Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia are often depicted in the media as places where women do not have the most basic of rights such as an education or the right to work in public.

Furthermore, the perception is that Muslim communities established in the West in places such as Europe, North America and Australia also promote similar practices that prevent women actively participating in society, and therefore deny them access to areas such as education and work. Moreover, there is an impression that Muslim women do not pursue education and work in West, due to conflict between Western and Islamic values. As a result there are many studies relating to this subject, such as (Bhimji, 2012), (Contractor, 2012), (Gilliat-Ray, 2010), (Hakim et al., 2010) and (Kabir, 2010)

Thus, this research on the topic 'Muslim women in Britain: Challenges faced in Education and Work' focuses on issues that may prevent full participation in these fields. As a result, the research questions examine four key areas, the educational situation, and the workplace situation; challenges faced in education and work, and British society. The hypotheses are that Muslim women value education and work, face challenges pursuing these fields, and wish to participate in British society.

A sample of Muslim women involved in education and work were selected from British society to contribute to this research. The method of inquiry utilises both quantitative and qualitative approaches; as data from quantitative research allows the extent of the problem to be established, whilst qualitative data allow a deeper understanding of the situation. The findings are presented in empirical format, meaning they are taken from real-life experiences or observation, and can be verified or disproved by observation or experiment. Thus, this research provides a current perspective to the ongoing discussion on the position of Muslim women in society, and therefore contributes to the knowledge in this field of study.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The role that women play in any society is one of significance, in relation to their social status and public participation. Similarly, the role of Muslim women is one that has been of interest since the advent of Islam. The Arab society at the time of the revelation was one of patriarchy – a system of society or government, in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). In pre-Islamic Arabia women were treated as no more than chattel, and married women as inheritable property; thus, the reforms of society mentioned in the Qur'an and *Hadith* (tradition) were revolutionary, as they liberated women, and give them rights greater than any other society until the liberation of women in the Western world (Syed, 2004, p.2).

The positive image of women is reinforced in the Qur'an with chapters such as *al-Nisa* (the Women), *Maryam* (Mary), *Saba* (Sheba) mentioning issues related to women like marriage, divorce and inheritance, as well as providing good role models. Furthermore, the Qur'an mentions incidents where women have demanded fairer treatment from men, with chapters such as *Mujadilah* (the women who pleads) and *Mumtahanah* (the women to be examined). Moreover, the Prophet reiterated the themes in the Qur'an in his sayings, 'The best of you is he who is best to his family' (Sahih al-Bukhari), 'You have rights over your women and your women have rights over you' (Sunan al-Tirmidhi) and 'Do not prevent women from going to the Mosque' (Sahih al-Bukhari). Thus, the Prophet's vision of Islam was egalitarian [that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities (Oxford Dictionary)] and he lived this ideal (Keddie, 2007, p.163).

However, despite having such ideals within the teachings of Islam, the perception of Muslim women today is that they are oppressed and have no personal freedom (Subedi, 2010, p.78). The West views that the seclusion and oppression of Muslim women originate from practices within Muslim countries; and thus, such practices reflect the backward conditions of its people, religion and culture (Falah and Nagel, 2005, p.151). Nevertheless, it can be argued that such adverse practices which are attributed to Islam are based upon traditional cultural practices and not Islamic legal provisions or religious norms (Rehman and Breau, 2007, p.350). Even so, due to the lack of distinction made between religious and cultural practices within Muslim countries, the negative image of Muslim women will be related back to Islam. As a result, such negative perceptions of Muslim women may also be associated with migrant Muslims communities established in Europe, North America and Australia.

## **1.1 Background of the Study:**

This research that I propose is part of a larger body of knowledge based on the studies of the position of Muslim women in society. Some of the broader aspects of such studies relate to the subject of the emancipation of Muslim women and human rights, as can be seen in the research of (Ali, 2008), (Engineer, 2008), (Kassam, 2010), (Nourai-Simone, 2005), and (Raghavan and Levine, 2010). Other studies have focused specifically on the position of Muslim women in Britain, such as (Bhimji, 2012), (Contractor, 2012), (Gilliat-Ray, 2010), (Hakim, et al., 2010) and (Kabir, 2010); and cover issues such as stereotypes, *hijab* (veil), feminism, identity, and integration.

Furthermore, the issue of Muslim women in relation to education and work has received much media interest in recent times, with articles about the neglect of women's education in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Watkins, 2013), banning the veil in higher education in France (Salomone, 2013), and religious prejudice at work in the UK (Qureshi, 2013). Thus, the issue of Muslim women and the barriers faced pursuing education and work is not one that is solely limited to Muslim countries.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem:**

Islam is the fastest growing faith community in Europe; immigration is one of the prime reasons for this shift in numbers (Nachmani, 2010, p. 35). Thus, according to the Pew Forum (2011, p. 124) the Muslim population in European countries such as France, Germany and Britain are 4.7, 4.1, and 2.9 million Muslims respectively. In other words, they represent a significant minority. Therefore, if we assume the gender divide is equal, there are nearly 1.5 Muslim women in Britain, which again represents a significant number in terms of population. Moreover, citizens in the UK are entitled to equality in services and public functions, which include the pursuit of education and work (Equality Act, 2010).

However, some perceive that Muslim women in Britain are still oppressed, and face gender discrimination from within the Muslim community, and religious discrimination from outside the Muslim community; with 69% of participants from a poll taken in 2010 believing Islam encouraged the repression of women (Khan, 2013). Others view that even in democratic countries Muslim women are held back from pursuing education and work by their households (Burke, 2012). There is also the perception that Muslim women cannot integrate in a homogenous manner into British society due to their different outlooks and perspectives (Bhimji, 2012, pp.144-145).

Thus, with these issues in mind, this research that I propose will explore the topic of 'Muslim women in Britain: Challenges faced in Education and Work'.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

To enable a detailed exploration of the topic, the study will focus on the following research questions, as stated in the proposal (Uddin, 2013).

1. To understand the educational situation related to Muslim women in British society.
2. To understand the workplace situation in relation to Muslim women in British society.
3. To understand the challenges faced in education and work by Muslim women living in Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
4. To understand the public role of Muslim women in relation to British society.

### **1.4 Hypotheses**

The hypotheses for this study, as stated in the proposal (Uddin, 2013) are:

1. Education and work are important to Muslim women living in Britain.
2. Muslim women face more challenges in society in comparison to Muslim men, when pursuing education or work.
3. Muslim women see themselves as an integral part of British society and have a role to play within it.

The methods used to collect suitable data for the research, and the process used to ensure its validity and reliability are explained in the 'Methodology' chapter. Moreover, the results from the research are presented in the 'Findings' chapter in an empirical format – meaning that conclusions are drawn based upon data collected from real-life experiences or observations (Kumar, 2005, p.8), and thus, in this manner the results are 'capable of being verified or disproved by observation or experiment' (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This research paper will not use diacritical marks for long vowels in Arabic words which are shown in italic.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The question of ‘Muslim women in Britain: Challenges faced in education and work’ is grounded in a larger body of knowledge based on studies of the position of Muslim women in society, as can be seen by research, such as that of Gilliat-Ray (2010), which is based on a broad study of Muslims in Britain, and covers issues such as Muslim communities, education, leadership, gender, identity and youth; whereas the research by Contractor (2012) is more specific to issues relating to Muslim women, such as stereotypes, *hijab* (veil) and Islamic feminism. On the other hand, the research by Bhimji (2012) is specific to the study of Muslim women from the Asian subcontinent, and focuses on issues such as identities in the mosque, the virtual sphere and integration. Furthermore, the research by Shah (Hakim et al., 2010) relates to a study on Muslim women and the conflict between Western and Islamic culture, and the challenges faced by Muslim women due to this situation. Moreover, the research by Kabir (2010) relates specifically to the Muslim youth, and issues such as identity, media, the *niqab* (face veil) and *Shari‘ah* (Islamic law).

Thus, these pieces of research highlight the wide range of issues that are associated with the study of Muslim women in Britain. Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of this new research focused on the ‘challenges faced in education and work’ in relation to these other studies.

Gilliat-Ray, S., 2010. *Muslims in Britain: An Introduction*. UK: Cambridge University Press. This research discusses Muslims in Britain from an historical context by linking their roots in Britain to their lands of origin (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). Part of the discourse discusses Muslim women’s pursuit of work and careers. Gilliat-Ray (2010, p.213) observes that Muslim women are economically inactive, at almost double that of other faith groups; and that this is attributed to ideological, cultural and structural factors (2010, p.213). However, this assumption is primarily based on a national census taken in 2001; thus, the figures may not be reflective of the current situation in Britain.

Even so, there are more recent reports that show the figure for Muslim women’s economic inactivity to have increased (Anon., 2011) but the source of such findings is unreliable. Nevertheless Gilliat-Ray (2010, pp.213-214) views that the cause for the lack of participation of Muslim women in Britain, as being more linked to religious and cultural practices within the Muslim community, rather than the lack of employment opportunities in the labour market. Thus, Gilliat-Ray (2010, p.214) argues that Pakistani and Bangladeshi

women feel a cultural obligation to remain home and fulfil a role of supporting their men folk, rather than pursue higher education and careers.

However, the research that I propose for this project will determine whether culture or religion are factors that affect Muslim women in education and work; by referring to the opinions and personal experiences of participants, rather than statistics on the levels of economic inactivity.

Contractor, S., 2012. *Muslim Women in Britain: De-Mystifying the Muslimah*. UK: Routledge.

This research is based on the experiences of young Muslim women living in a secular British society (Contractor, 2012, xii). According to Contractor (2012, p.8) some Muslim communities deny women access to education, economic activity and property rights due to cultural practices. However, it is not clear if this is a notion linked to Muslims living in Muslim countries, or in the West. Moreover, Contractor (2012) discusses other issues such as Islamic feminism, the *hijab* (veil), and stereotypes. Contractor (2012, p. 1) views the *hijab* is treated with suspicion in Western societies and leads to stereotypes; whilst patriarchy in Muslim communities reinforces the stereotypes, which denies Muslim women of their social and personal rights. Though for some feminists the *niqab* (face veil) is seen as a barrier to [women's] advancement, and not the *hijab* (Lewis and Mills, 2003, p.596), nevertheless, Contractor (2012, p.9) views that main challenge the Muslim women face is overcoming cultural patriarchy which denies them education, careers and social authority.

The research by Contractor's (2012, p. 1) is based on testimonies taken from Muslim women; similarly this new research will give participants opportunities to express their life experiences. However, the research that I propose for this project will differ in the sense the research questions are aimed specifically at educational and workplace situations, rather than the broader society.

Bhimji, F., 2012. *British Asian Muslim Women, Multiple Spatialities and Cosmopolitanism*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

This research addresses second generation British Asian women and their role in British society (Bhimji, 2012). According to Bhimji (2012, p.1) Muslim women arriving from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh post World War Two faced cultural racism, which limited their employment opportunities; however, in recent times Muslim women face barriers in the form of religious racism, especially with the veil being a point of scrutiny. However, it could that

the early Muslim generation faced the problem of overcoming the language barrier; which was a similar problem faced by Muslim immigrants in France (Nielsen, 2013, p.108). Therefore, racism may not be the root cause of the problem.

Furthermore, the issue of the veil being a problem, could be an exaggeration of a matter that became a topic of discussion in 2006, due to a cabinet minister requesting the removal of the full veil (*niqab*) from members of the constituency, when visiting the surgery (Anon., 2006). Therefore, more current research on challenges faced by Muslim women in education and work can highlight whether the veil is still an issue, or matter linked to that a period of discussion in the past.

Another issue argued by Bhimji (2012, pp.144-145) is that Muslim women cannot be integrated in a homogeneous manner into British society due to their different outlooks and perspectives. However, in a multicultural society, the word 'homogeneous' can have an ambiguous meaning. Thus, the question remains, do British Muslim women feel an integral part of British society?

Thus, the research that I propose for this project will explore issues like language and integration; however, it will differ from Bhimji's study in that research participants involved will also be non-Asians.

Hakim, F. et al., 2010. *Women, Islam and Western Liberalism*, ed. F. al Yafai. London: Civitas.

This research focuses on the needs of Muslim women in Britain, from a British context and a religious context (Hakim et al., 2010). According to Shah (Hakim et al., 2010) the conflict between Western and Islamic cultural values and beliefs, adds to the challenges faced by Muslim women in Britain. Thus, this research projects a perception that there is a clash of identity between being Muslim and British; the consequence being that Muslim women face challenges from within the Muslim community and its cultural practices, and the negative portrayal and misconception in the wider society (Hakim et al., 2010).

The issue of whether cultural practices within the Muslim community hinder the progress of Muslim women in education and work will be considered as part of the new research. However, the negative portrayal of Muslim women in the media is an issue that even those who work within the media have noticed as being unfair stereotyping (Shirazi 2010, p.252). In the end, the media portrayal only represents one perspective; whilst government and the law represent another view, one of a fairer Britain (HM Government, 2010). Therefore, whether the media have any effect over and above the equal opportunities

promoted by the government remains to be seen, and is another issue that will be considered in this new research.

However, in general the research that I propose for this project will cover the issue of Muslim and British identities different from Shah (Hakim et al., 2010) by not presupposing there is a clash of identities whilst undertaking the research. Thus, the reporting of any such notion in this new study will be dependent upon the personal experiences of research participants.

Kabir, N. A., 2010. *Young British Muslims: Identity, Culture, Politics and the Media*. UK: Edinburgh University Press.

This research is concerned with young British Muslims between 15-30 years of age. Although the focus is on Muslims and their multiple identities – ethnic, religious, cultural and local (Kabir, 2010, p.xii), there is a section dedicated to Muslims in Britain - an overview (Kabir, 2010). There are two main points of significance within the research; firstly, a historical account of Muslims in London from the 2001 census, is used in a similar manner to Gilliat-Ray (2010), to highlight Muslims as the most disadvantaged of all the faith groups in the city, with Muslim women as the least economically active. Secondly, a report by the Mayor of London in 2006 mentions, that 70 percent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children were living in poverty (Kabir, 2010, p.36). However, the issue of poverty can be viewed relatively by Muslim immigrants, who may consider they are in a better situation here in Britain, compared to their original homelands (Balicki and Wells, 2011, pp.139-140). Therefore, regardless of such statistics, Muslim women may still feel they have better opportunities in the UK for education and work; and this could be a factor that arises in the new research.

Thus, the research that I propose for this project will approach the topic of education and work, without any pre-supposed cultural or ethnic disadvantages assigned to Muslims; rather, any challenges faced in these fields will be reported based on the life experiences of research participants.

## **2.1 Summary**

In summary the above mentioned title gives a sense that there are problems and challenges faced by Muslim women in Britain. Though the scopes of these research projects are wide and cover areas that are not part of this new research, they do highlight that education and

work are a common theme throughout these studies. Nevertheless, in some cases the data used to explain findings were outdated, whilst in other cases the findings were clouded with other issues that were not specifically related to education and work. Therefore, this new research aims to contribute to the field of study by providing current data, reflective of society today, on the basis that there are no inherent problems or challenges faced by British Muslim women in education or work, other than what is reported by the participants in the research; thus providing an unbiased reflection of the current situation faced by Muslim women in Britain.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Methodology is defined as ‘procedures of inquiry in a particular field’ (Merriam-Webster Dictionary); and research is defined as ‘studious inquiry or examination’ (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The research methodology of this study was based on the question, ‘Muslim women in Britain: Challenges faced in Education and Work’, as a result, the following research design was utilised in this study.

### **3.1 The General Perspective**

A theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance behind a methodology (Crotty, 1998, p.66); hence, the term perspective is sometimes interchangeably used as meaning methodology. This study utilises a mixture of quantitative and qualitative perspectives. It was felt that a quantitative approach was suitable because, quantitative research ‘explains phenomena that can be collected numerically and analysed statistically’ (Aliaga and Gunderson, 2002). Hence, the extent of the research problem could be examined in this manner. In addition, it was felt that a qualitative approach was also suitable for the study because, qualitative research ‘is interested in the meaning people give to the world, from their experiences within it’ (Merriam, 2009). Thus, this approach enables a deeper understanding of the research problem, by asking the ‘why’ questions, and therefore, attempts to discover the reasons behind the problem (Grady, 1998, p.4). Moreover, qualitative research allows the researcher to gain the unique experiences of the participants, and therefore, understand the multiple realities of a situation (Bassett, 2004, p.8).

### **3.2 The Research Method**

The study uses descriptive and phenomenological research methods. According to Best and Kahn (1992) descriptive research is concerned with ‘the conditions that exist, the effects being felt, and trends that are developing’. Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Thus, this approach is used because: phenomenological research is concerned with ‘the lived experience of others and their feelings, thoughts and awareness’ (Ray, 1994). From the various research methods available, these two methods have been chosen as they suit the needs of the research question, which is to explore in detail the problems of a selected group of the British population. The descriptive method provides quantitative data, whereas

the phenomenological method provides qualitative data. Moreover, in phenomenological research the researcher attempts to omit their own personal experience from the research process (Taylor, 2005, p.180), thus, allowing a description of the complete picture of a situation (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, the data received from the participants' experiences inform the researcher of the situations related to the research question.

Although other available methods such as experimental, casual comparison, correlation, evaluation, ethnographic and action research were available, they were not selected for this study, because some were unsuitable for the research topic, whilst others could not be applied due to time and space limitations.

### **3.3 The Research Context**

The research has been conducted at various venues in London during the months of July and August 2013. The research participants are Muslim women from Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali backgrounds who are involved in education or work. The sample of participants was chosen using two non-probability techniques called 'convenience sampling' and 'snowball sampling'. The choice of non-probability sampling techniques over probability sampling techniques is due to the former allowing the researcher to select a portion of the population that suited the research, whereas in the latter method, every member of the population has a possibility of being included (Henry, 1990, p.17). Hence, the convenience sampling technique has been used, as it allows the researcher to 'select participants [based] on proximity, eases of access, and willingness to participate' (Urdan, 2010, p.3); whilst, the snowball sampling technique allows the researcher to 'ask individuals to provide the information needed to locate other potential participants' (Babbie, 2009, p.208).

### **3.4 Data Collection**

The tools used for data collection are questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group. The advantage of using a questionnaire is that by 'having closed ended and open ended questions it is possible to collect large amounts of quantitative and qualitative data in a relatively short time frame' (Katsirikou and Skiadas, 2010, p.293). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to 'expand on questions in order to explore the responses in greater detail' (Mitchell and Jolley, 2010, p.277); and the focus group allows the researcher to 'collect concentrated data on precisely the topic of interest' (Morgan, 1997, p.13).

Once again, whilst other data collection tools such as document review, observations and case studies were available, they were not considered suitable for this research mainly on the basis that they were quite time consuming, and could not be accommodated within the timeframe of this study.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of bringing order and structure to data collected to give an understanding of its meaning (Shkedi, 2005, p.94). Thus, the process involves checking the raw data for reliability and validity, and then reducing it into categories. Quantitative data have been manually analysed into tallied groups, and the data have been presented as frequencies and tabulation. Qualitative data were transcribed and coded and then analysed using Content Analysis – which is a procedure for studying the content and themes in written or transcribed text (Insch, Moore and Murphy, 1997).

### **3.6 Limitations**

There were various methodological limitations considered as part this study. The issue of the limitation of the time and money available for this study meant that the research was concentrated in the London area only. Similarly due to these limitations the methods used for sampling and data collection have been chosen primarily for speed and accessibility. In the data collection process it may be possible that participants are not whole fully truthful in answering questions for various reasons, like shyness or pride. There is also the consideration that the participants may not have fully understood the questions, as English is not their first language; even so, translators have been employed to minimise such effects. However, overall due to the limitations in the sample size and location of the research, the findings may not be representative of other town, cities, or areas in Britain, and therefore the British Muslim women population.

### **3.7 Summary**

In summary, the methodological approach used in the research of the topic ‘Muslim women in Britain: Challenges faced in Education and Work’, is designed to ensure that sufficient data is collected from a suitable sample of the population, within the given time frame of this research, to enable a meaningful analysis of the current situation in the field of study.

## Chapter 4: Ethical Issues

As this study will involve research with participants or respondents that are currently in education or work, there are some ethical issues that need to be considered. Ethics can be defined as ‘norms of conduct’ – what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviours, or defined as ‘standards of conduct’ methods and procedures used within a discipline, or it can be defined as ‘moral or social values’ – which includes social responsibility, human rights, and health and safety (Resnik, 2011). The nature of the sample and the methodology of research will imply certain ways of interacting with people [participant] (Oliver, 2010, p.9).

The following are potential ethical issues to consider in this study:

1. Participants (general issues) – all participants will voluntarily participate once informed consent is gained, and treated with dignity, and their views and ideas respected; their personal information will be protected by the data protection act 1998, and they will have the right to anonymity and confidentiality. All research will be conducted in accordance with Health and Safety laws.
2. Participants (specific issues) – researcher and research assistants to consider the etiquettes of gender interaction according to the Muslim faith if researchers are a different gender to the female participants; and to take into consideration customs and practices that may be linked to ethnicity and sub-cultures and to overcome any language barriers that may affect the consistency and validity of data collection.
3. Data collection – all responses will be recorded accurately, without adding any bias from the researcher, and any errors in recording will be identified, and the data discounted or clarified in the findings.
4. Presentation of data – the findings of the research will be presented in a clear and unambiguous manner, so that other researchers and non-researchers alike can understand the information.
5. Publication of data – to establish authorship, consider the disclosure and conflict of interest of data collected, the avoidance of plagiarism, the maintenance of subject confidentiality, the maintain accuracy of information at the time of publication, and to determine copyright when publishing in journals.

## **Chapter 5: Findings**

The research was carried out in London over a period of three weeks between July and August 2013. A sample of female participants was taken from three ethnic groups within the Muslim community of all ages, and levels of education and work. Quantitative data collected have been analysed using statistical techniques (Dawson, 2007, p.128), and the findings presented as frequencies e.g. percentages. Qualitative data collected have been analysed using content analysis; whereby the data are reduced, categorised, coded and tallied (Glatthorn, 2005, p.195). According to Dawson (2007, p.119) the method of ‘code and count’, allows the data to be measured quantitatively; and the codes can be numbers or words (Dawson 2007, p.122). The coding method used for this study, can be found in (Appendix D).

### **5.1 Validity and reliability**

A questionnaire with 70 questions was available on a web link and in paper form (Appendix A). Some of these questionnaires were self-administered whilst others were administered by the researcher in person with the participants. There were also five responses received via semi-structured interviews consisting of 15 questions (Appendix B), and three responses received via a focus group consisting of twenty questions (Appendix C).

All data received were checked for completeness, errors, and bias; ensuring the quantitative method measured data correctly (Dawson, 2007, p.114). In addition, qualitative data were measured for validity using the technique of ‘face validity’, whereby the answers are linked to the question to establish a logical link (Kumar, 2005, p.154). According to Kumar (2005, p.156) ‘reliability’ in research refers to the ability of the data collection instruments to produce consistent measurements when used again under same or similar conditions. The data collected by the instruments in his study consistently referred logically to the questioned asked, thus the collection process was reliable.

The results of the findings of this research are as follows.

## 5.2 Participants

The total number of participants who contributed to the research was 45 (see fig. 1); with 37 responses received via a questionnaire, 5 responses via interviews and 3 responses via a focus group.

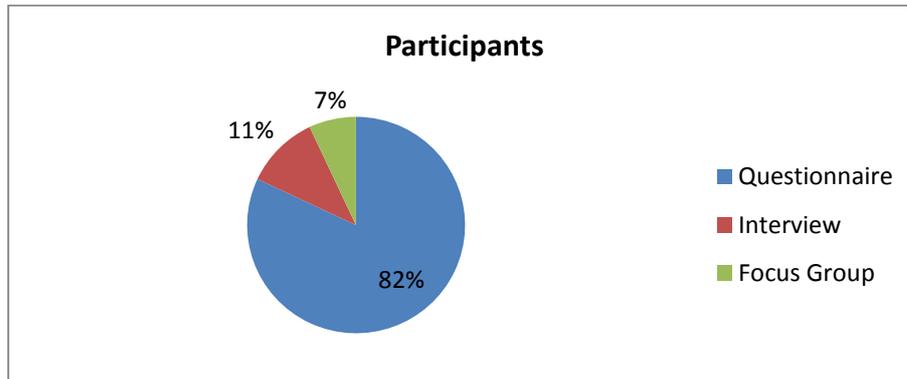


Figure 1 Participants

Responses were sought from participants of all ages; with the majority of the responses coming from participants between 21-30 years of age (see fig. 2). The marital status of the participants was closely split between being single and married (see fig. 3).

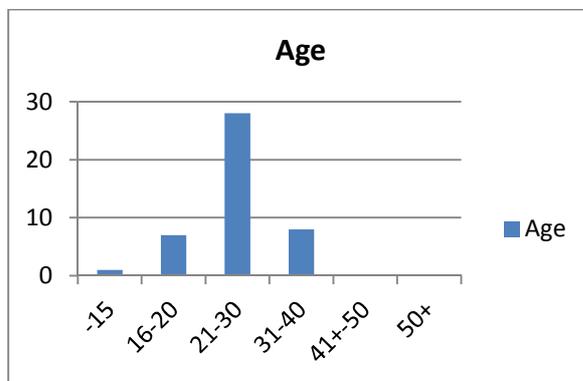


Figure 2 Age

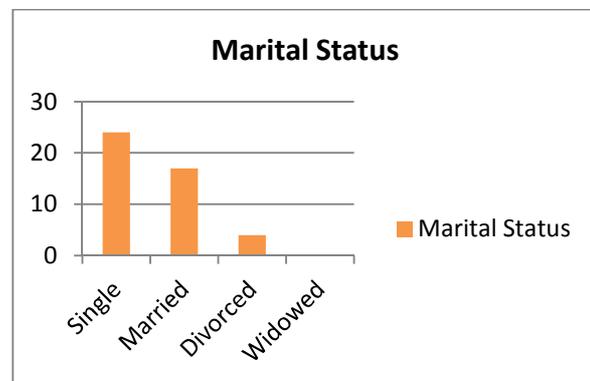


Figure 3 Marital Status

The majority of the participants had been in the UK since birth, with only 9% having been in the UK for less than four years; and 90% of the participants lived in London. The participants were from Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali backgrounds; with 71% of responses received was from the Bangladeshi community (see fig. 4). The most common language spoken by the participants were English and Bengali (see fig. 5).

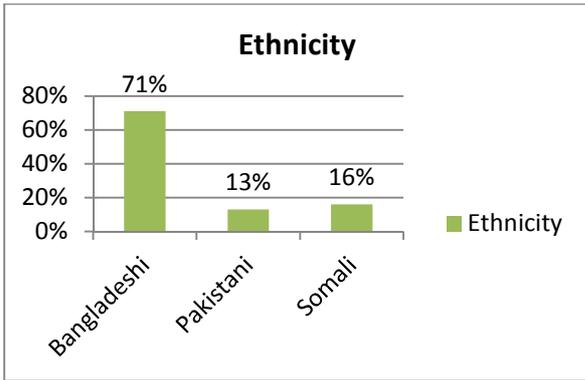


Figure 4 Ethnicity

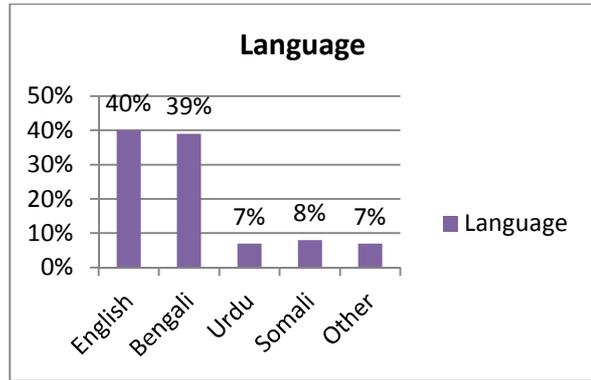


Figure 5 Language

### 5.3 Educational Situation

Forty percent of the participants were in education; and the majority of those who were not in education stated they had left only within the last three years. All the participants had been educated in the UK, with 35% of the participants having reached an Undergraduate Degree level (see fig. 6). In addition, 53% of the participants wanted to go onto further education in order to gain Undergraduate Degrees, Masters Degrees, as well as other qualifications (see fig. 7).

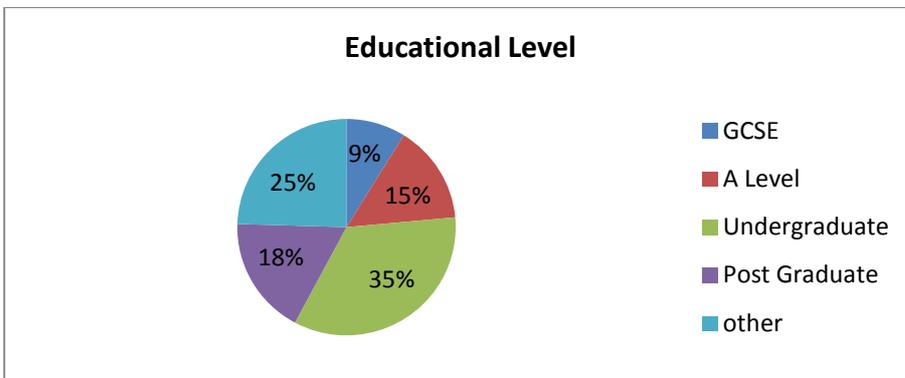


Figure 6 Educational Level

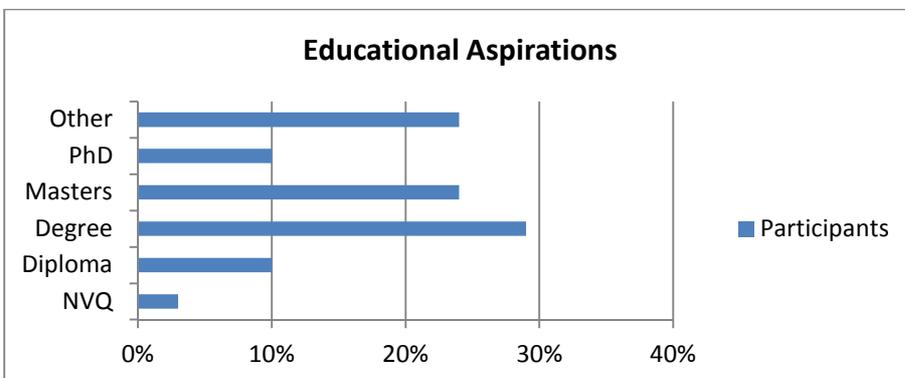


Figure 7 Educational Aspirations

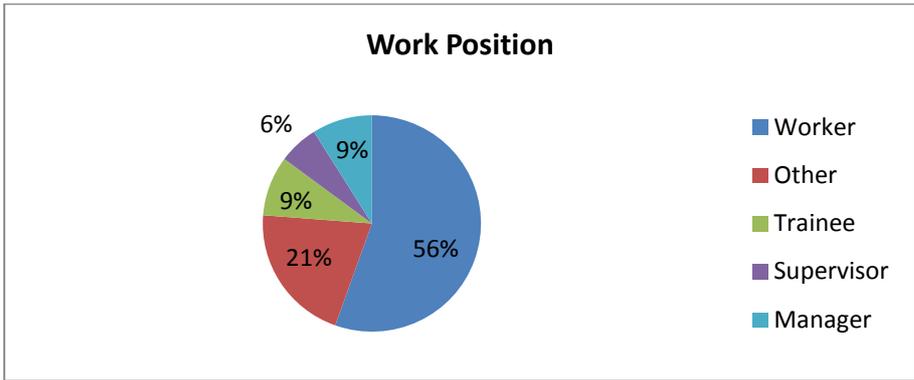
The majority felt that there were no religious, cultural or other factors that supported them in education. However, 38% believed there were factors that help them; with the highest factor being religion and its encouragement to seek knowledge, as well as cultural factors like family expectations and helping the community. Similarly, 65% felt that there were no factors that hindered their pursuit of education; even so, the minority still felt that there were obstacles and barriers mainly from the cultural practice of getting married young and settling down to become homemakers. Others felt that it was not acceptable to travel far, or they did not have the time for studying

The majority of participants felt that Muslim women were pursuing education to their potential ability, as well as receiving the support of the Muslim community. On the issue of educational opportunities, 88% of the participants felt that the UK offered better opportunities compared to Muslim countries; with the main factors being: accessibility, equality of genders, the legal enforcement of education, and the provision of free education. The main criticism of Muslim countries was that they prevented women from studying; having to pay fees for basic education, and the lack of laws that could enforce the need to study.

Regarding whether there was a conflict between Western and Islamic values in pursuing education, a majority of 41% believed that there was a conflict; the main factors being religious expectations, adherence to an Islamic dress code, free-mixing of genders, and an aversion to Western theories. Even so, 71% of the participants stated that overall they had a good or excellent educational experience.

#### **5.4 Workplace Situation**

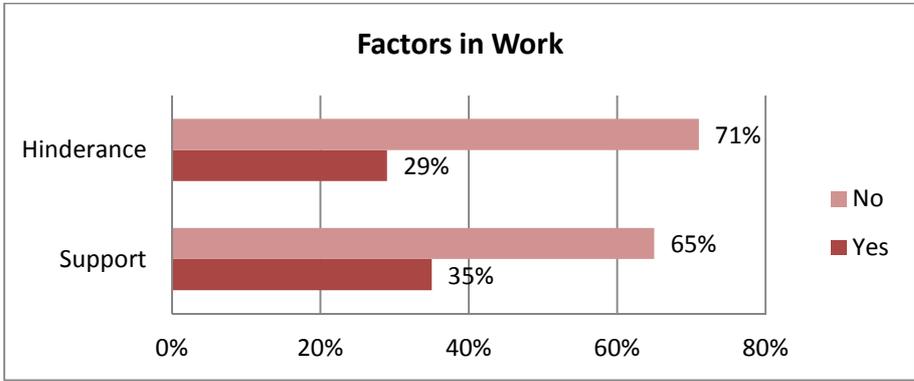
Seventy one percent of the participants were at work; and the majority of those who were not at work stated they had left only within the last three years. Ninety percent of the participants had always worked in the UK. Most of the participants were workers, with a total of 15% in supervision or management (see fig. 8).



**Figure 8 Work Position**

The majority of the participants wanted to go further in their careers; however, many did not specify any position they wished to attain; rather they used terms like ‘higher ambitions’, ‘job satisfaction’, whilst others stated a specific role like a teacher, Judge, counsellor; and others said they wanted to be a at the level of supervisor or manager.

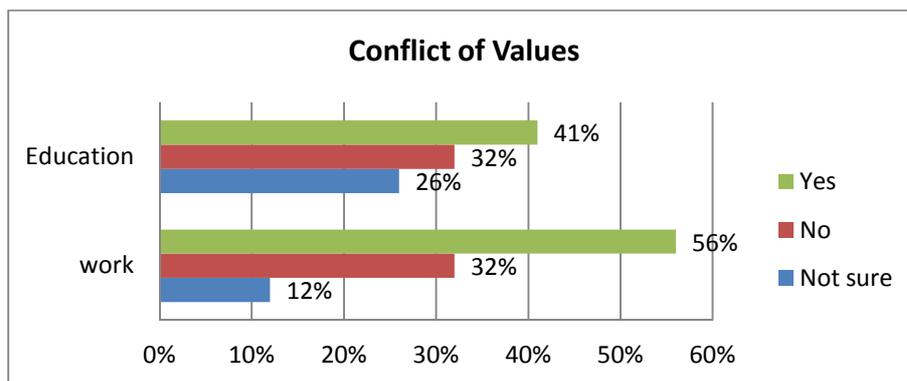
The majority of participants felt that there were not any religious, cultural or other factors that supported or hindered their pursuit of work or careers (see fig. 9). However, 35% believed there were factors that help them; with the highest factor being religion, family, culture, and community in support of their pursuit of work; whereas 29% of participants cited issues such as family, discrimination, culture and dress-code as a hindrance to the pursuit of work.



**Figure 9 Factors in Work**

The majority of participants felt that Muslim women were pursuing work or careers to their ability. Moreover, 22% viewed that the Muslim community definitely supported educational pursuits; whilst 35% felt ‘some are’ supportive. On the issue of work and career opportunities 82% of the participants felt that the UK offered better opportunities compared to Muslim countries; with the main factors being: more opportunities in the UK, access, equality and freedom. The main criticism of Muslim countries was that their limited opportunities, limited rights to work, family and cultural objections.

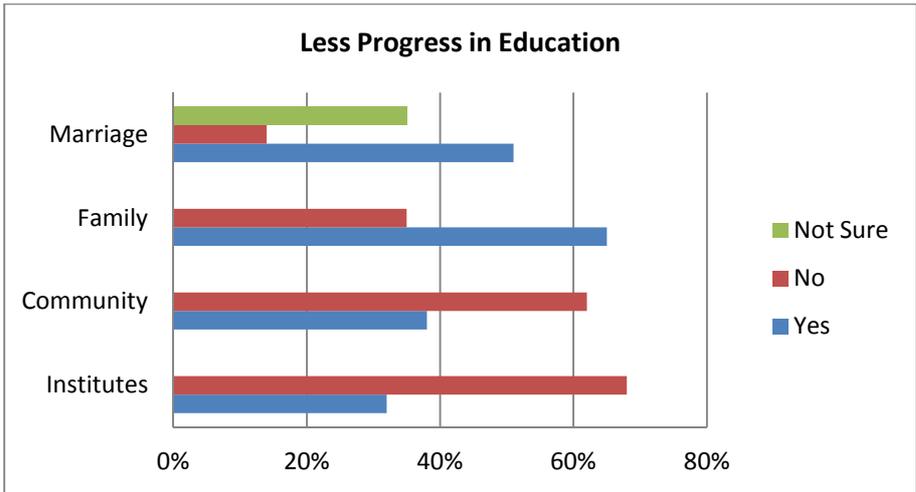
Regarding whether there was a conflict between Western and Islamic values in pursuing work or careers, a majority of 56% believed that there was a conflict (see fig. 10); the main factors being un-Islamic western values, free-mixing of the genders, adhering to an Islamic dress code, and family commitments. Even so, 76% of the participants stated that overall they had a good or excellent educational experience.



**Figure 10 Conflict of Values**

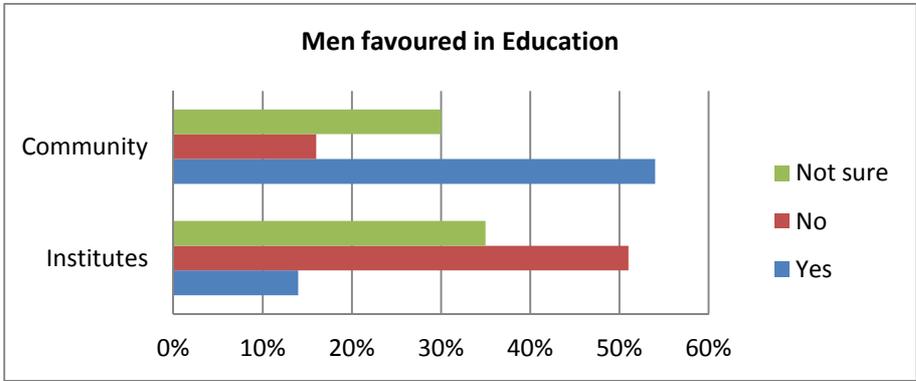
### **5.5 Challenges faced in Education**

A slight majority believed cultural or religious views did not affect progress in education; however, 47% believed Muslim women were likely to progress due to marriage, culture, dress code and religious views. The majority also viewed that due to marriage, disapproval of the family, Muslim women are less likely to pursue education; but not due to the disapproval of the Muslim community, or impediments imposed by Educational institutes (see fig. 11). However, those who felt there were impediments due to educational institutes mentioned factors like dress code, religion and finance. Other factors viewed to hinder education were, family commitment, free-mixing, lack of motivation, and lack of finance.



**Figure 11** Less Progress in Education

The majority viewed that having English as a second or foreign language made progress in education difficult and limited opportunities. Regarding men being favoured over women in educational pursuits; 54% felt the community favoured men, whereas 51% were of the opinion that educational institutes did not favour men (see fig. 12). Overall the participants viewed that being a Muslim woman did not lessen or enhance their position in the Educational environment, and the majority felt the educational situation would get better for the future generations.



**Figure 12** Men favoured in Education

**5.6 Challenges faced at Work**

The majority believed cultural or religious views affected progress in education; due to factors stereotyping, conflict with religious values, free-mixing of the genders, and the unacceptability of socialising with work colleagues. The majority also viewed that the Muslim community approved of Muslim women working; however, marriage, disapproval of the family, and impediments placed by the employer or job (see fig. 13). Furthermore, the job place impediment included factors such as, discrimination, dress-code and hours of work.

Other factors considered hindering the pursuit of work or careers were conflicts with religious values, family commitment, free-mixing of genders, and stereotyping.

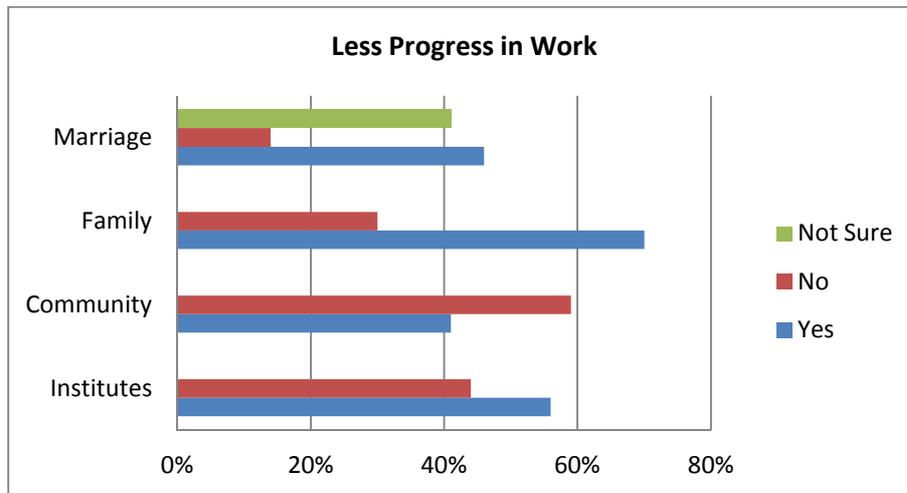


Figure 13 Less Progress in work

The majority viewed that having English as a second or foreign language made progress in work difficult and limited opportunities in work. Regarding men being favoured over women in work or career pursuits; 49% felt the community favoured men, whereas 45% were not sure whether the job market favour men (see fig. 14). Overall the participants were of the opinion that being a Muslim woman did not lessen or enhance their position in the workplace environment, and the majority viewed the workplace situation will get better for the future generations.

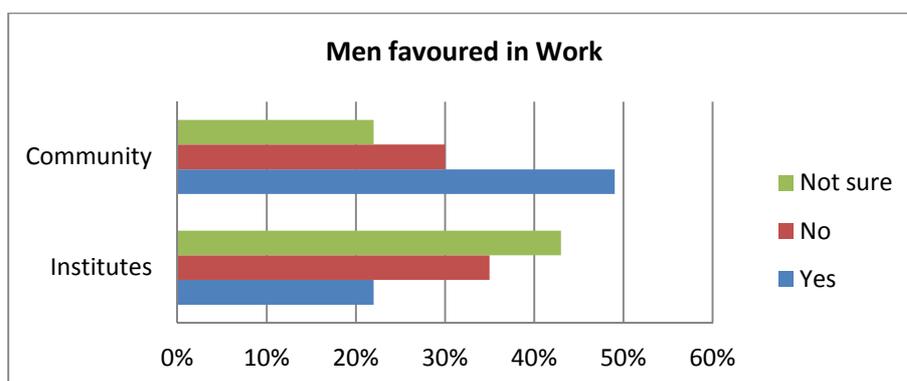


Figure 14 Men favoured in Work

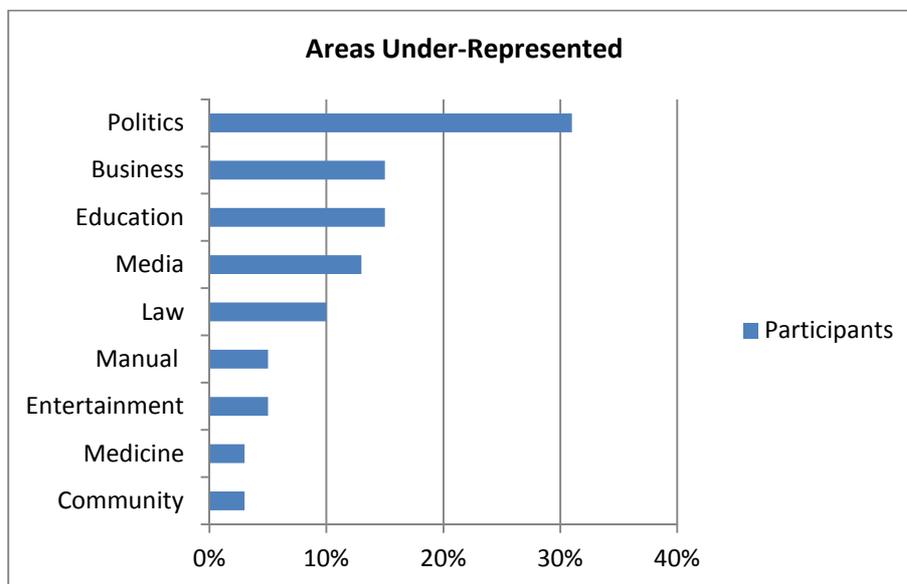
### 5.7 British Society

The majority viewed that Muslim women should have a public role in society, the less that objected did so on the grounds that women should not speak in public and must wear Islamic attire. Regarding the British population, 71% felt that the British public viewed Muslim women negatively; the main factors being that they are seen as being oppressed, face

discrimination and stereotyping. However, there was a high minority that felt that the women were also viewed positively by the population.

Furthermore, 59% expressed the opinion that the British media depicted Muslim women unfairly; mainly by misrepresentation, showing them oppressed and stereotyping their roles. In addition, 73% viewed that the British government had not done enough to Muslim women in the field of education and work in a positive manner. The levels of visible efforts of Muslim women in education and work were seen as average, as was their level of integration into British society, with 65% viewing this was due to religious and cultural practices. However, 62% felt that the level of integration would increase over the next 10 years.

Moreover, 62% believed that Muslim women were still under-represented in areas such as politics; business and education (see fig. 15).



**Figure 15 Areas Under-Represented**

The majority viewed that education and work is highly important, as it empowers women, and gives them the opportunity to participate fully in society. Overall the participants considered that the main challenges for future generations of Muslim women, was to overcome discrimination and stereotyping, and to take advantage of the opportunities that were available.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

This study is based on the topic ‘Muslim women in Britain: Challenges faced in Education and Work’. Thus, it relates to three key aspects as proposed by the research questions which all refer to Muslim women in Britain; the educational situation, the workplace situation, and challenges faced within these environments. In addition a fourth aspect was explored relating to British society, which was necessary in order to place this study within the context of previous studies.

### **6.1 Participants**

The participants in the research were chosen specifically because they were active in education or work; and this was primarily so that their personal experiences would form part of the response in addition to taking consideration of their personal view of a situation. Most of the previous research in the field of study such as (Gilliat-Ray, 2010) and (Kabir, 2010) have considered Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslim women living in Britain, where both ethnic groups have a long standing history in Britain (Ansari, 2004, p.152). However, this study also considers participants with a Somali background, as they represent a fast growing ethnic community in Britain (Muir, 2012); and thus their experiences also contributed to the knowledge base. However, this study does not concentrate on the differences between the ethnic groups; rather their collective views are taken to represent the current situation of Muslim women in the field of research.

Furthermore, the previous studies highlighted different aspects regarding Muslim women in Britain; (Gilliat-Ray, 2010) mentioned economic inactivity, (Contractor, 2012) and (Bhimji, 2012) considered restrictions due to cultural practices, and Shah (Hakim et al., 2010) and (Kabir, 2010) discussed disadvantages based on negative portrayals and social standing. Therefore, it was important to have participants active within the fields of education and work for the following reasons; firstly, they had already achieved entry into the field of research, and secondly, because they were best placed to explain any challenges they faced in their pursuit of education or work. Hence, the term ‘challenge’ used throughout this study is taken to mean ‘something that needs a lot of skill, energy and determination to deal with or achieve’ (MacMillan Dictionary).

## 6.2 Discussion

The [common] perception of Muslim women is that they are uneducated and oppressed, due to cultural and traditional practices originating from Muslim countries (Faisal, 2003). The stereotypical image is that Muslim women remain uneducated and oppressed within certain parts of British society (Nye, 2012). In light of such perceptions, and previous studies on the subject, therefore the findings of ‘this research’ which refers to the research that I carried out in this project can be understood as follows.

The overall research is divided into six distinct sections; five of the sections relate to the research question, whilst the sixth section relates to personal details. For the purpose of this study, participants that completed the questionnaire, interviews and focus group are referred to as participant #1, where #1 represents the numbers assigned to the individual.

## 6.3 Educational Situation

This part of the research tries to ascertain the educational situation of Muslim women in Britain; mainly to gain an insight into the level of educational pursuit among them. The term ‘situation’ is taken to mean ‘the set of conditions that exist at a particular time in a particular place’ (MacMillan Dictionary). An assessment of the situation in 2003 raised concerns that Muslim girls had low educational aspirations, with women from ethnic groups between the ages of 16-24 years not progressing onto into higher education (Archer, 2003, p.146). More recent studies showed that cultural patriarchy denies them an education (Contractor, 2012, p.9). Thus, the two main issues of the lack of educational pursuit identified by these previous studies are low aspirations and cultural patriarchy.

This research found that the majority of participants in education had already reached undergraduate degree level. There were many others that expressed the wish to undertake vocational courses; however, the majority aimed to gain a degree, a masters or a PhD. Therefore, the results show that the participants have high aspirations when it comes to education. One interviewee said “The previous generation [of women] never studied, never had the opportunity, this generation has changed and are happy to study and work”<sup>1</sup> (August 13, 2013). Another interviewee said “my family were pro-education; I got a lot of support and encouragement”<sup>2</sup> (August 7, 2013). Therefore, it was generally perceived that the educational situation had improved for Muslim women in the UK, and this reflected in the

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<sup>1</sup> Participant #43

<sup>2</sup> Participant #42

educational experience of the participants, with only 6% saying they had a below average or poor experience and 65% stating that they had a good to excellent experience.

When questioned on factors that may have helped or hindered their pursuit, two thirds of the participants expressed that there was no particular factor, whether it be religious, cultural or otherwise. In other words, education was seen as a normal aspect of life, and being a Muslim woman did not influence their path to education. However, some participants felt religion was a positive factor as it encourages the pursuit of knowledge (Appendix D), whilst others viewed marriage and homemaking were the main hindrance to pursuing education (Appendix D). Hence, some of the responses received were “I got married young, so my studies stopped”<sup>3</sup> (August 5, 2013) and “back then it was not common for Asian women to study further”<sup>4</sup> (August 6, 2013). Thus, some participants felt cultural factors had shortened their educational pursuit.

The majority of participants were of the opinion that the UK offered better education opportunities for Muslim women when compared with Muslim countries. The UK was seen to offer more access, equality and the right to an education. In addition, funding was viewed to be a key issue, some comments received were, “education is free in the UK”<sup>5</sup> (August 7, 2013) and “they offer grants in the UK”<sup>6</sup> (July 31, 2013). On the other hand, Muslim countries were criticised for the lack of access to education for women, poor funding and the absence of rights to an education. Moreover the participants were of the opinion that religion and culture hindered progress in education, the views expressed were “Muslim countries are too strict on women, whereas in the UK women are not judged”<sup>7</sup> (August 20, 2013) “Women in Muslim countries are stereotyped as housewives”<sup>8</sup> (August 7, 2013), and “in Pakistan a young girl got shot in the head for going to school”<sup>9</sup> (August 20, 2013). Nevertheless, the vast majority felt that the Muslim community in the UK was different from Muslim countries, and that it promoted Muslim women in education. Therefore, the assumption that Muslim communities deny women access to education (Contractor, 2012, p.8) is more associated with Muslim countries than in the UK.

However, even though the majority viewed the UK as better for education, 41% of participants still believed there was a conflict of interest between Western and Islamic

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<sup>3</sup> Participant #4

<sup>4</sup> Participant #5

<sup>5</sup> Participant #39

<sup>6</sup> Participant #6

<sup>7</sup> Participant #39

<sup>8</sup> Participant #40

<sup>9</sup> Participant #36

cultural values in education. The key issues of conflict were seen as, a clash with the observance of religious practices, difficulty in maintaining an Islamic dress code (*hijab*), and the avoidance of free-mixing between genders. Thus the views expressed were “subjects like dancing and P.E. [physical education] being compulsory is a problem [religiously]”<sup>10</sup> (August 7, 2013) and “having to wear uniform compromises Islamic dress code”<sup>11</sup> (August 7, 2013). Therefore, the conflict is mainly related to social practices; however, there was some conflict with the subjects taught. Thus, there is some agreement with Shah (Hakim et al, 2010) that conflict in values adds to the challenge faced by Muslim women in Britain.

Overall what can be ascertained from this part of the research on ‘Educational Situation’ is that, generally the educational situation for Muslim women in the UK is viewed as positive. Muslim women do have high aspirations in education; thus, in relation to previous studies (Archer, 2003) the situation has improved. Moreover, there is an appreciation that the UK offers Muslim women better opportunities, than in Muslim countries; which are criticised for their lack of educational opportunities for Muslim women, which is further complicated with religious and cultural practices that subordinate women. Therefore, the opinion is that patriarchal practices are more a hindrance to women’s education in Muslim countries, than here in the UK.

#### **6.4 Workplace Situation**

This part of the research tries to ascertain the workplace situation of Muslim women in Britain; mainly to gain an insight into the level of work and career pursuit among them. According to previous studies, Muslim women are the least economically active (Kabir, 2010, p.36); and the lack of participation is due to religious and cultural practices within the Muslim community (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, pp.213-214). As a result, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women feel a cultural obligation to remain at home (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p.214). Thus, the main issue identified by these previous studies are the lack of participation due to religion and culture.

This research found that two third of all participants were working; with the majority wishing to progress further with their careers. Therefore, the results show that the participants are economically active, and have high aspirations when it comes to work and career. However, the majority expressed that there were no factors that supported or hindered their progress in work. Thus, similar to those questioned about their education, the participants felt

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<sup>10</sup> Participant #40

<sup>11</sup> Participant #39

that working is a normal part of life, regardless of being a Muslim woman. Even so, there were still many that viewed there were factors that influenced them. On a positive note, some of the responses received were, “My language skills are core strength”<sup>12</sup> (August 11, 2013), “my family supported me”<sup>13</sup> (August 11, 2013) and “wanting to contribute to society”<sup>14</sup> (August 7, 2013). In other words, the positive issues are related to personal motivation. However, some of the factors mentioned as a hindrance, did relate back to the issues or religion and culture highlighted by (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). Thus, some of the comments received from participants were, “religious and family values and duties make it harder to work in this society”<sup>15</sup> (August 13, 2013), “Culture, I got married young”<sup>16</sup> (August 12, 2013), and “as a Muslim, some environments of work are not suitable”<sup>17</sup> (August 9, 2013). Nevertheless, the issues of conflict did not necessarily relate to ‘feeling obliged to stay at home’ (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p.214), rather it was concerning conflict of values whilst at work.

Similar to the question on education, the majority viewed that the UK offered better work opportunities for Muslim women when compared with Muslim countries. Again, the reasons why the UK was favoured, was due to issue of access, equality, and freedom to work (Appendix D). Some of the responses received were, “the UK is a safe place, [there is] no harm”<sup>18</sup> (August 13, 2013) and “you can go out and do the same as other people”<sup>19</sup> (August 20, 2013). On the other hand, the main criticism of Muslim countries was that there are no rights for women to work, and little opportunity in the job market (Appendix D). Hence, some of the comments were “Women need to liberate their rights”<sup>20</sup> (August 7, 2013) and “Muslim countries are unstable”<sup>21</sup> (August 7, 2013). In other words, the participants felt that Muslim countries lacked some of the basic rights related to women, and among them, security to go out and work in society. Therefore, the notion that ideological, cultural, and structural factors contribute to economic inactivity (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p.213), are issues strongly associated with Muslim countries. However, just over half the participants felt that the Muslim community promoted the pursuit of Muslim women in work. This majority is significantly smaller than the response received when asked about the Muslim community

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<sup>12</sup> Participant #21

<sup>13</sup> Participant #20

<sup>14</sup> Participant #16

<sup>15</sup> Participant #30

<sup>16</sup> Participant #28

<sup>17</sup> Participant #18

<sup>18</sup> Participant #43

<sup>19</sup> Participant #45

<sup>20</sup> Participant #39

<sup>21</sup> Participant #42

supporting Muslim women in education. Thus, there must be reason for this difference, hence why a similar question is asked in the section ‘Challenges faced in Work’, which will explain the response in further detail.

Again, considering the majority of participants viewed that the UK provided better work opportunities, 56% still felt that there was a conflict between Western and Islamic values in work. This figure is much higher than the response received regarding education. A key issue expressed as a reason for this conflict, is seen as the un-Islamic culture regarding socialisation after work, which includes an atmosphere of drinking, smoking and music; which many participants objected to on religious grounds (Appendix D). Others feared that the working environment encouraged free-mixing between the genders, whilst some feared their Islamic dress code would have to be compromised (Appendix D). Therefore, the conflict is once again related to what is acceptable as a social norm. Hence, for example, the TV presenter Kristiane Backer left her job with MTV when she became a Muslim, because she felt it conflicted with her new found values (Zebiri, 2008, p.125).

Overall what can be ascertained from this part of the research on ‘Workplace situation’ is that Muslim women in the UK are economically active and have high aspirations in work. However, religious and cultural practices can be a hindrance to pursuing work, in some cases getting married and having children meant that participants left work all together, although these latter such issues can affect women in general. Contrary, to the study by (Gilliat-Ray, 2010) the majority of participants from Bangladeshi and Pakistani did not feel a cultural obligation to stay at home; and furthermore, it was not clearly evident that religious and cultural practices within the Muslim community contributed to any economic inactivity. However, the workplace situation was not as positive as the educational situation, primarily because the workplace environment clashed with more with social practices deemed religiously unethical.

## **6.5 Challenges faced in Education**

This part of the research tries to ascertain the main challenges faced by Muslim women when pursuing an education. It differs from the previous section on ‘Educational Situation’ as it asks the participants directly about factors perceived as being challenges for Muslim women observed from previous studies; and thus, it allows the researcher to delve deeper into the research problem. In particular, participants were asked about challenges associated with a Muslim life i.e. family, culture and community; educational institutions and the English

language. Some of the trends noticed from previous studies are that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women feel a cultural obligation to remain at home and fulfil their duties (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p.214), and patriarchy in Muslim communities reinforces stereotypes, which deny Muslim women their social and personal rights (Contractor, 2012, p.1).

In relation to Muslim life, 47% viewed that religious and cultural factors hindered the progress of Muslim women in education. The main issue likely to hinder progress was marriage (Appendix D), as one participant said “there is family pressure [to stay home] once married”<sup>22</sup> (August 12, 2013), and this is further linked to the cultural notion that once you have a family you have to stay at home, “women are seen as those who give birth and look after children”<sup>23</sup> (August 7, 2013). Others felt that the maintenance of Islamic dress code was an issue, “wearing a uniform will compromise my *hijab*”<sup>24</sup> (August 13, 2013), moreover, others viewed that the educational environment would not be suitable, “being lectured by men and free-mixing in a class could be a problem”<sup>25</sup> (August 7, 2013). Thus, there were cultural and religious concerns.

Furthermore, the majority were of the opinion that Muslim communities in the UK supported women pursuing education; however, 54% expressed that they felt Muslim men were favoured over Muslim women. Some of the opinions were, “some still view that sons provide, so encourage them to go further”<sup>26</sup> (August 7, 2013) and “a small percentage of the community still follow stereotypical views”<sup>27</sup> (August 7, 2013). Thus, there is evidence that there are patriarchal practices still prevalent in Muslim communities. However, many participants felt that such practices were contrary to religious teachings, “there is a battle between religious and cultural expectations”<sup>28</sup> (August 11, 2013) and “women are hindered by cultural reasons which have nothing to do with religion”<sup>29</sup> (August 11, 2013). Therefore, these patriarchal practices were not seen as religious values rather they were embedded in cultural values. Hence, Barlas argues, patriarchy was introduced into the [Muslim] community by local cultures and not due to Islamic teachings (Kassam, 2010, p.26). Nevertheless, many participants were of the opinion that “things have changed now; and

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<sup>22</sup> Participant #28

<sup>23</sup> Participant #38

<sup>24</sup> Participant #43

<sup>25</sup> Participant #42

<sup>26</sup> Participant #39

<sup>27</sup> Participant #42

<sup>28</sup> Participant #21

<sup>29</sup> Participant #19

women are [seen as] the same as men”<sup>30</sup> (August 13, 2013). Thus, the influence of patriarchal practices is seen to be lessening in today’s society.

The majority of participants felt that educational institutions did not hinder the progress of Muslim women. However, some expressed that they “cannot wear religious dress, or pray on time”<sup>31</sup> (August 13, 2013) and “wearing *hijab* may cause others to treat you unwell”<sup>32</sup> (August 12, 2013). Even so, these opinions were among the minority, and besides educational institutes in the UK would have to abide by the (Equality Act, 2010), thus ensuring that people are not discriminated on the basis of sex, race or religion. Hence, other issues like high fees and student loan were more of a concern, “the cost of university courses is a factor [hindrance]”<sup>33</sup> (August 5, 2013) and “the associated student loans entail interest [usury] which is clearly prohibited in our religion”<sup>34</sup> (August 9, 2013). In other words, the institutes did not have any policies that hindered Muslim women; rather there were religious and ethical issues to be considered by the participants.

On the issue of having English as a second or foreign language, 64% percent viewed that it could be an impediment that hindered progress in education. The opinions expressed were “that a lack of English language limits choice of course accessible, as well as the learning experience with regards to interacting with the tutor”<sup>35</sup> (August 20, 2013) and “you might not understand the lesson, if your English is not good”<sup>36</sup> (August 13, 2013). Thus, such learners face the same problem of overcoming the language barrier like early Muslims immigrants (Nielsen, 2013, p.108). Hence, poor command of the English is seen as a major obstacle in pursuing education.

In general the participants felt that being a Muslim women did not lessen or enhance their position in the educational environment. However, they viewed the main challenges that hindered progress in education was cultural values such as marriage and family commitment, and the religious observance of an Islamic dress code and avoiding free-mixing with the opposite gender. Therefore, patriarchal practices were considered a hindrance, although to a lesser degree than previous generations of Muslim women. Moreover, it was felt that a good level of English language was required to appreciate all the educational opportunities available to them.

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<sup>30</sup> Participant #44

<sup>31</sup> Participant #30

<sup>32</sup> Participant #24

<sup>33</sup> Participant #15

<sup>34</sup> Participant #18

<sup>35</sup> Participant #45

<sup>36</sup> Participant #43

## 6.6 Challenges faced in the workplace

This part of the research tries to ascertain the main challenges faced by Muslim women when pursuing work or career. It differs from the previous section on ‘Workplace Situation’ as it asked the participants directly about factors perceived as a challenge for Muslim women from previous studies; and thus, allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the research problem. Similar to the section regarding ‘Challenges faced in Education’, participants were this time asked about challenges associated with ‘work’ in the areas of Muslim life i.e. family, culture and community; employers and the job market and English language. Some of the trends observed from previous studies are that Muslim women are economically inactive at almost double that of other faiths (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p.213), that Muslim communities deny women access to economic activity (Contractor, 2012, p.8) and Muslim women face religious racism, with the veil being a point of scrutiny (Bhimji, 2012, p.1).

In relation to Muslim life, 59% believed Muslim women were less likely to pursue work or careers because of their religious and cultural views; which is a higher figure than for education. Some of the views which explained this phenomena related to cultural issues; such as, “Muslim women stay at home, as the father is financially responsible, otherwise the husband”<sup>37</sup> (August 2, 2013) and “I have to be close to home to bring up family, so the less responsibility at work the better”<sup>38</sup> (August 11, 2013). Whilst others felt working conflicted with their religious views, “they want us to follow their rules and conduct that goes against Islam”<sup>39</sup> (August 12, 2013) and “companies do not feel comfortable working with women covered up”<sup>40</sup> (August 7, 2013).

Moreover, working practices concerned some participants, “religion and custom does not allow us to socialise with men”<sup>41</sup> (August 11, 2013) and “networking events contain alcohol, music and other things at odds with Muslim values”<sup>42</sup> (August 9, 2013). Therefore, religious and cultural values were seen as hindering pursuit of work and careers, from the angles of implementing patriarchal practices and a conflict of religious values. Thus, there was some agreement that one of the main challenges women face is overcoming cultural patriarchy (Contractor, 2012, p.9).

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<sup>37</sup> Participant #12

<sup>38</sup> Participant #19

<sup>39</sup> Participant #27

<sup>40</sup> Participant #17

<sup>41</sup> Participant #20

<sup>42</sup> Participant #18

Furthermore, the majority were of the opinion that Muslim communities in the UK supported women pursuing work and careers. Therefore, this view disagrees with the notion that ‘Muslim communities deny access to economic activity’ (Contractor, 2012, p.8). However, 49% felt that Muslim men were favoured over Muslim women. Thus, this figure was slightly less than for education, but nevertheless still significant. Some of the opinions expressed were “women are predominately seen as home carers”<sup>43</sup> (August 13, 2013) and “there is a false impression that women are weak, and men are dominant”<sup>44</sup> (August 11, 2013). However, 30% expressed the opinion that the Muslim community treated women with equality, in relation to work. Thus, comments received were, “there is no difference being a Muslim woman”<sup>45</sup> (August 7, 2013) and “I do not see any favouritism”<sup>46</sup> (August 20, 2013). Therefore, although cultural patriarchy was still evident, many had witnessed a change in the attitude of the Muslim community towards women and work.

Moreover, 56% viewed that employers and the job market placed impediments that made it difficult for Muslim women to work. Thus, this figure is in contrast to the situation regarding education institutes, where the majority felt there were no impediments. The main factors seen as impediments were discrimination and dress code (Appendix D). Some viewed that, “employers generally discriminated [against women] based on gender”<sup>47</sup> (August 7, 2013), whilst others felt that it was because they were “Muslim and woman”<sup>48</sup> (August 20, 2013). In addition, it was viewed that “many jobs have high expectations, long hours and responsibilities which are hard for Muslim women to uphold”<sup>49</sup> (August 20, 2013). Therefore, the impediments ranged from experiencing prejudice, to feeling that the demands of the job were unreasonable. However, there were again mixed feelings regarding the workplace environment, with many viewing that employers and the job market treated Muslim women fairly. Nevertheless, the overall perception of employers and the job market was seen in a negative manner.

On the issue of having English as a second or foreign language, 73% percent viewed that it could be an impediment that hindered progress in work. Some opinions expressed were that “effective communication is required in work life, otherwise you may not progress

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<sup>43</sup> Participant #30

<sup>44</sup> Participant #21

<sup>45</sup> Participant #41

<sup>46</sup> Participant #45

<sup>47</sup> Participant #38

<sup>48</sup> Participant #36

<sup>49</sup> Participant #34

high”<sup>50</sup> (August 20, 2013), “there will be less [job] opportunities”<sup>51</sup> (August 7, 2013) and “it will be difficult to work”<sup>52</sup> (August 13, 2013). However, according to Kabir (2010, p.50) there are many opportunities available in the UK to learn English language, so it should not take long for communities to develop their skills to take advantage of the Job market. Therefore, it is a case of taking the initiative, as the opportunities for language learning are available.

In general the participants viewed that being a woman did not lessen or enhance their position in the workplace environment. The participants felt the main challenges in pursuing work was cultural practices that hindered women, and religious values that clashed with the working environment, as well as discrimination faced in the job market based on gender and religion. A good level of English language was seen as a requirement to progress high in the pursuit of work and careers.

## **6.7 British Society**

This part of the research tries to ascertain the perception of Muslim women in British society in relation to education and work. The key areas of inquiry relate to the Muslim women in the public domain, British public perception, British media portrayal, and integration in society. The trends observed from previous studies are that, Muslim women face barriers in the form of religious racism, with the veil being a point of scrutiny (Bhimji, 2012, p.1), the negative portrayal of Muslim women in the media (Shirazi, 2010, p.252), and Muslim women cannot be integrated in a homogenous manner into British society due to their different outlooks and perspectives (Bhimji, 2012, pp.144-145).

This research found that 94% believed Muslim women should have a public role in British society. Some of the opinions expressed were “women need to get more involved in society, we need more public speakers”<sup>53</sup> (August 7, 2013), “women should have public roles in politics and judiciary”<sup>54</sup> (August 7, 2013), and “women who are in parliamentary roles, are seen as role models”<sup>55</sup> (August 7, 2013). Moreover, the participants viewed that areas such as politics, business, education, media and law still remained under-represented (Appendix D). Therefore, these opinions are similar to the finding by Gilliat-Ray (2010, p.218), that there

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<sup>50</sup> Participant #45

<sup>51</sup> Participant #40

<sup>52</sup> Participant #44

<sup>53</sup> Participant #42

<sup>54</sup> Participant #41

<sup>55</sup> Participant #40

are individual Muslim women who have become prominent in the public sphere, in areas such as politics, entertainment, business and journalism. However, the majority who participated in this research believe that the role Muslim women in public should be seen as the norm rather than an exception.

However, a few participants did object to Muslim women having a public role on religious grounds; the views expressed were “some things are unacceptable like speaking publicly”<sup>56</sup> (August 13, 2013), “religion will limit some aspects”<sup>57</sup> (August 7, 2013), and “*hijab* should be observed”<sup>58</sup> (August 13, 2013).

The majority of participants felt the British public had a negative image of Muslim women, who are seen as “oppressed and voiceless”<sup>59</sup> (August 5, 2013), with the *hijab* being seen as a symbol of oppression, “Muslims women are seen as oppressed because they cover up, even though it is their choice”<sup>60</sup> (August 7, 2013). Others felt that a failure to interact with the public was a cause for such impressions, “Muslim women are reserved; they should stand up and speak out”<sup>61</sup> (August 11, 2013). Therefore, integration was seen as a factor that could help improve the image of Muslim women; however, 73% of participants viewed that the current level of integration was only average or below average. Moreover 65% believed the lack of integration was due to cultural or religious practice. Therefore, these figures would corroborate that ‘Muslim women cannot be integrated in a homogenous manner’ (Bhimji, 2012, pp.144-145).

However, it could be argued that this does not necessarily represent a lack of progress, as Britain is both a multicultural and multi-faith society (Grant and Portera, 2010, p.297), therefore, there is no need for Muslim women to become homogenised within British society. Hence, many participants were of the opinion that Muslim women were seen by the public in a positive manner (Appendix D), comments received were, “I never witnessed animosity, [the public are] generally friendly”<sup>62</sup> (August 13, 2013) and “perception depends on locality, in London it is good, up North [England] it is worse”<sup>63</sup> (August 13, 2013).

Furthermore, 59% felt the British media depicted Muslim women unfairly. The most common aspects viewed were the misrepresentation of Muslim women, depicting women as

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<sup>56</sup> Participant #43

<sup>57</sup> Participant #39

<sup>58</sup> Participant #44

<sup>59</sup> Participant #15

<sup>60</sup> Participant #39

<sup>61</sup> Participant #19

<sup>62</sup> Participant #44

<sup>63</sup> Participant #43

oppressed, and stereotyping (Appendix D). Thus, some of the comments received were, “Muslim women are demonised”<sup>64</sup> (August 1, 2013), “we are stereotyped”<sup>65</sup> (August 6, 2013). The media was seen one of the main causes for influencing the negative view of Muslim women among the population, with reports distorting the truth of the matter, as participants expressed “they make Muslims look bad, e.g. terrorist”<sup>66</sup> (August 12, 2013) and “they show what they want to”<sup>67</sup> (August 12, 2013). In other words, as one participant put it “you hear [good] about Muslims in the local paper”<sup>68</sup> (August 7, 2013), meaning, the major news outlets do not concentrate on positive coverage. Thus, overall the participants viewed the media as biased and therefore, the results from this study agreed with Shirazi (2010, p.252) that Muslim women are portrayed negatively by the media. Hence, 73% felt that the British government was not playing a sufficient role in promoting Muslim women in education and work in a positive manner.

Finally, participants were asked what they viewed as challenges in education and work for future generation of Muslim women; the response received was that mainly women would have to take the opportunities available to them in the UK as they had opportunities to access to education and work (Appendix D). Religious and cultural practices were not considered to be future hindrances; rather it would be a case of overcoming discrimination and stereotyping, which still remain as the main challenges (Appendix D).

## **6.8 Summary**

However, the trends found within this research indicate that religion and culture are still a prime issue that form a challenge in the fields of education and work, and will continue to be so within the near future. There was still evidence that patriarchal practices still exist within the Muslim community, some of which has been blamed for lack of progress for women in education and work. However, the general indication was that the effect of patriarchal practices was lessening, with many participants differentiating between religious and cultural practices. Nevertheless, some still felt that the level of patriarchy which is still high in Muslim countries has an effect on the Muslim community in Britain. On the other hand, there were many participants that felt that there were sufficient changes to practices

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<sup>64</sup> Participant #9

<sup>65</sup> Participant #5

<sup>66</sup> Participant #26

<sup>67</sup> Participant #28

<sup>68</sup> Participant #39

within their family and community that they were treated with equality with regards to education and work.

Moreover, another area of conflict identified the balance between Western and Islamic values. Some the participants saw this as no problem whilst other seemed perturbed by the situation. Thus, this had an effect as to the level they integrated with British society; with the educational environment being viewed better than the workplace environment, which is perceived to have more issues of conflict. Even so, the vast majority felt that Muslim women should have a public role in society, even though they were perceived negatively by the public and the media, though overall participants agreed this was another challenged that needed to be overcome.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine the challenges that Muslim women faced in pursuing education and work in Britain. The topic was chosen because the role of Muslim women in society is an ongoing discussion that forms the basis of many studies. Some of these studies centred on the traditional and modern role of Muslim women in society (Abu-Lughod, 1998), (Zayzafoon, 2005) and (Lovat, 2012), others are concerned with Muslim women and human rights (Kassam, 2010) and (Raghavan and Levine, 2010); whilst some studies focus on Muslim women in Britain (Contractor, 2012) and (Gilliat-Ray, 2010), exploring issues such as stereotypes, feminism, identity and integration.

However, this research focused specifically on Muslim women in 'education and work', as these issues have been the centre of much discussion in recent times; for example the restriction of education and public participation for women in Afghanistan by the Taliban (1996-2001) (Skaine, 2002, p.69), and the shooting of the school girl Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan in 2012 (Boone, 2012), which questions Muslim communities and their stance with regard to women in education and work. Moreover, the veil is seen as an issue of conflict in the West; with a 12 year old being banned from wearing the *niqab* (face veil) in school (Qureshi, 2007) and Jack Straw, the then Leader of the House of Commons, telling a member of his constituency that the removal of the face veil allowed greater value in conversation (Sturcke, 2006), hence, the question of Muslim women and their level of integration in British society.

Furthermore, some of the findings of previous studies are that Muslim women have low educational aspirations and are economically inactive (Gilliat-Ray, 2010), denied access to education and work due to cultural practice (Contractor, 2012), face religious racism and cannot integrate into British society (Bhimji, 2012) and receive negative portrayal in the media (Hakim et al., 2010). Therefore, with such issues in the media and an analysis of previous studies in mind, this research aimed to determine what were the 'challenges faced in education and work' according to the experience of Muslim women living in Britain.

The first research question which focused on the 'Educational Situation' aimed to understand the current level of educational pursuit among Muslim women. The results showed that women felt that the UK offered better educational opportunities in comparison to Muslim countries, namely because there was more access, equality, choice and freedom in the UK. Moreover, it was felt that the educational institutes did not hinder access to opportunities based on gender, race or religion. However, it was clearly evident from

responses received that the patriarchal cultural practices were seen a major factor that posed a challenge in pursuing education. Thus, many participants complained that their education was cut short due to getting married young, and having to settle down with children and family. Considering many of the participants were born and educated in the UK, some felt that cultural values pressured them into leaving education in favour of a homemaking role. Others felt that the Muslim community still favoured men to pursue education as it would lead to jobs and careers, and that culturally it was accepted that fathers and husbands provide for their household. Therefore, psychologically these patriarchal practices were deep root concepts that needed to be overcome. Thus, this research agreed with the study of (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, p. 214) that Pakistani and Bangladeshi women feel a cultural obligation to stay at home.

Furthermore, the observance of religious practices formed a challenge that hindered the educational progress of many participants. Many considered the *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) of socialisation prohibited women pursuing education for fear of free-mixing with the opposite gender, and in some cases even to learn from male teachers. Thus, these views revealed a rigid and strict interpretation of Islam that forgets that even the Prophet used to teach women (Maqsood, 2011). Thus, many of the perceived conflict with Western values in education related to what is accepted as a social norm, hence, some participants felt physical education (P.E.) was prohibited for women, when again the Prophet showed an example of running with his wife (Al-Ghazali, 2009). Therefore, this research agreed with (Hakim et. al, 2010) that religious practices conflicting with Western values add to the challenges faced by Muslim women in Britain. Even though, in some cases the religious practices may have roots in patriarchal culture rather than divine text.

The second research question focused on the ‘Workplace situation’ and tries to ascertain the level of activity for Muslim women in work and career. The majority of the participants who contributed to this research were in active employment. However, they were mainly of at the level of worker, rather than supervision or management. Again, many felt pursuing high profile jobs was not required as their main role related back to responsibilities in the house, thus one participant expressed the view that “the less responsibility at work the better”<sup>69</sup> (August 11, 2013) meaning work was not seen as the main concern; thus this issue related back to patriarchal notions of the role of the women in society. However, here again there are excellent examples from the early generation of Muslim women ‘who were never

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<sup>69</sup> Participant #19

denied the right to work, and thus, they were not condemned for leaving their homes for such action' (Talhami, 1996, p.130). Thus, this research agrees with (Gilliat-Ray, 2010, pp.213-214) that religious and cultural practices are linked to economic inactivity.

Moreover, religious practices were again seen as conflicting with Western values of work. The key issue this time related to view that socialising was prohibited for women, thus roles that required networking or after work activities, were considered inappropriate, beside there was a notion that segregation should be maintained at all times. However, as mentioned above, the early Muslim women worked in public and were not condemned for this action (Talhami, 1996). Therefore, areas of perceived conflict in work need to be addressed in light of modernity, which will enable Muslim women to overcome barriers and thus to become empowered (Joseph and Nagmabadi, 2003, p. 323).

The third research asked the participant directly about perceived challenges in education and work. In most cases the responses reaffirmed that religion and culture formed the greatest challenges to overcome, namely in areas such as marriage, family values, religious practices – dress code and free-mixing. Therefore, this section of the research agreed with (Contractor, 2012, p.9) that 'cultural patriarchy is one of the main challenges for Muslim to overcome' and that 'some Muslim communities deny women access to education and economic activity' (Contractor, 2012, p.8), albeit in this case indirectly by promoting cultural and religious practices that inhibit women.

However, another key factor identified in this section was, discrimination by employers based on gender and religion. Many felt that being a Muslim woman limited their opportunities in the Job market. Thus they felt a major challenge to overcome was discrimination and stereotyping. Therefore, agreeing with (Contractor, 2012, p.1) that the *hijab* (veil) can be treated with suspicion in western societies and lead to stereotypes.

The final research question focused on British society and integration. Though the participants overwhelmingly viewed Muslim women should have a public role, it was clearly evident that there was lack integration into British society. Many of the issues identified for the lack of integration related back to the religious and cultural values, such as Islamic dress code, free-mixing, family values, and reputation (Appendix D). Thus, this part of the research agreed with (Bhimji, 2012) that Muslim women cannot integrate homogeneously into British society due to their values. Moreover, another aspect identified as a hindrance to progress in society was the misrepresented image of Muslim women in the media, which depicted them as oppressed, voiceless and stereotyped (Appendix D); and, this has a further effect of influencing the British public. Thus, this part of the research agreed with (Shirazi, 2010,

p.52) that 'the negative portrayal of Muslim women in the media unfairly stereotypes them'. Therefore, improving the image of Muslim women in British society requires integration and active participation in the public domain, and to challenge media perceptions in a proactive manner.

Therefore in relation to the original hypotheses, this research agreed that education and work are important to Muslim women living in Britain, However there remain many challenges to overcome and among them cultural patriarchy, and traditionalism in religious practice. In addition, women face more challenges than Muslim men in education and work, due to this inequality in culture and religion. Finally it agreed that Muslim women wish to play an active role in the public domain, and thus, see themselves as an integral part of British society - albeit in theory, as there was little evidence of active participation, and therefore, there was still much ground to cover in this arena.

## **Chapter 8: Recommendations**

The topic on ‘Muslim women in Britain: Challenges faced in Education and Work’ proved to be an interesting research. Interacting with the participants it could be seen that topic was of relevance to most Muslim women. However, due to time and space constraints dictated by the research timeframe, only certain aspects of the research problem could be explored. Therefore, recommendations for future research as follows.

The sample chosen were all active in education or work; so therefore the opinions of those who were unable to progress in these fields should also be considered. In addition, the participants used in this research were from Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Somali backgrounds; in future participants from other backgrounds such as Algerian, Egyptian, Iranian or Moroccan could be considered. Furthermore, the sample size consisted of 45 participants; thus, this number could be increased for future projects. Another point to consider is to ask the views of participant that are 40 years of age and over and thus gain their perspective of the problem; this research mainly had participant between the ages of 20-40 years.

Moreover, the participants were all from London; future research could extend to other parts of the UK, in order to gain an understanding of the research problem according to demographics. Similarly, mosques, religious institutions, educational institutes and employers could be approached to gain their perspective of the research problem. Furthermore, the scope of the topic can be expanded to include a more in-depth examination of other areas such as, social issues – examining family values, the position of woman in society; political issues – women in leadership, participation in government; religious issues – equality with men, women scholarship; and psychological issues – the effects of patriarchy, and having a western identity. Therefore, by examining these other areas, a deeper understanding of the problem can be gained; as many of these issues were identified within this research on ‘Challenges faced in Education and Work’. Thus, these recommendations are reflective of the vast nature of the research problem and different aspects that could be explored in the future.

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## Appendices: Appendix A - Questionnaire

### Section 1: Educational Situation

The following questions are related to your current or your recent experience in education.

*Please cross out incorrect answers e.g. Yes/~~no~~ or ~~Higher~~/same/~~lower~~; and provide further detail where requested.*

1. Are you currently in education? *Yes/no*
2. If not, when was the last time you were in education? *1-3 years ago/4-10 years ago/more than 10 years ago*
3. Was your education in the UK? *Yes/no*
4. What is your current level of education? *GCSE/A LEVEL/Undergraduate degree/Post graduate degree/Other: Specify\_\_\_\_\_*
5. Are you currently at the highest level of education you want to achieve? *Yes/no*

If no, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Are there any cultural, religious or other factors that have supported your pursuit of education? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

7. Are there any cultural, religious, or other factors that have hindered your pursuit of education? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you believe Muslim women in the UK have better opportunities to be educated than in Muslim countries? *Yes/no*

Please explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you believe Muslim women in the UK are pursuing education to their full potential? *Yes/some are/not sure/few are/no*
10. Do you believe Muslim communities in the UK promote Muslim women pursuing education? *Yes/some are/not sure/few are/no*
11. Do you believe there is any conflict between western and Islamic cultural values, for Muslim women pursuing education? *Yes/not sure/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

12. How do you rate your overall educational experience? *Excellent/good/average/below average/poor*

## Section 2: Workplace Situation

The following questions are related to your current or your recent experience at work.

*Please cross out incorrect answers and provide further detail where requested.*

13. Are you currently at work? *Yes/no*

14. If not, when was the last time you worked? *1-3 years ago/4-10 years ago/more than 10 years ago*

15. Have you always worked in the UK? *Yes/no*

If no, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

16. What is your current position at work? *Trainee/worker/supervisor/manager/other:*  
*Specify*\_\_\_\_\_

17. Are you currently at the highest level of the career you wish to pursue? *Yes/no*

If no, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

18. Are there any cultural, religious or other factors that have supported your pursuit of work? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

19. Are there any cultural, religious, or other factors that have hindered your pursuit of work?  
*Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

20. Do you believe Muslim women in the UK have better opportunities to work than in Muslim countries? *Yes/no*

Please explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

21. Do you believe Muslim women in the UK are pursuing work or career opportunities to their full potential? *Yes/some are/not sure/few are/no*

22. Do you believe Muslim communities in the UK promote Muslim women pursuing work or careers? *Yes/some are/not sure/few are/no*

23. Do you believe there is any conflict between western and Islamic cultural values, for Muslim women pursuing work or careers? *Yes/not sure/no*

If yes, please explain further: \_\_\_\_\_

24. How do you rate your overall experience of work? *Excellent/good/average/below average/poor*

### **Section 3: Challenges faced in Education**

The following questions are related to Muslim women and challenges faced in education.

*Please cross out incorrect answers and provide further detail where requested.*

25. Do you believe Muslim women are less likely to progress in education because of their cultural or religious views? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. *Specify* \_\_\_\_\_

26. Are Muslim women less likely to pursue higher education once they are married? *Yes/not sure/no*

27. Do you believe Muslim women are less likely to pursue higher levels of education due to the disapproval of their family? *Yes/no*

28. Do you believe Muslim women are less likely to pursue higher levels due to the disapproval of the Muslim community? *Yes/no*

29. Do you believe Muslim women are less likely to pursue higher education due to impediments placed by educational institutions? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

30. Do you think there are other factors that can hinder Muslim women pursuing education? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

31. Do you believe English as a foreign or second language; is an impediment that hinders Muslim women pursuing education? *Yes/no*

32. Do you believe Muslim women are treated less favourably compared to Muslim men, in their pursuit of education by the Muslim community? *Yes/not sure/no*

33. Do you believe Muslim women are treated less favourably compared to Muslim men, in their pursuit of education, by the educational institutes? *Yes/not sure/ no*

34. Do you feel less valued in the educational environment because you are a Muslim woman? *Yes/no*

35. Do you feel your position in the educational environment is enhanced because you are a Muslim woman? *Yes/no*

36. How do you feel the education situation will be for future generations of Muslim women? *Better/same/worse*

#### **Section 4: Challenges faced at Work**

The following questions are related to Muslim women and challenges faced at work.

*Please cross out incorrect answers and provide further detail where requested.*

37. Do you believe Muslim women are less likely to progress in work or careers because of their cultural or religious views? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

38. Are Muslim women less likely to pursue work or higher education once they are married? *Yes/not sure/no*

39. Do you believe Muslim women are less likely to pursue work or careers due to the disapproval of their family? *Yes/no*

40. Do you believe Muslim women are less likely to pursue work or careers due to the disapproval of the Muslim community? *Yes/no*

41. Do you believe Muslim women are less likely to pursue higher level of work or career opportunities due to impediments placed by the job market and employers? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

42. Do you believe English as a foreign or second language; is an impediment that hinders Muslim women pursuing work or careers? *Yes/no*

43. Do you think there are other factors that can hinder Muslim women pursuing work or careers? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

44. Do you believe Muslim women are treated less favourably compared to Muslim men, in their pursuit of work or careers by the Muslim community? *Yes/not sure/no*

45. Do you believe Muslim women are treated less favourably compared to Muslim men, in their pursuit of work or careers, in the job market and by employers? *Yes/not sure/ no*

46. Do you feel less valued in the workplace environment because you are a Muslim woman? *Yes/no*

47. Do you feel your position in the workplace environment is enhanced because you are a Muslim woman? *Yes/no*

48. How do you feel the workplace situation will be for future generations of Muslim women? *Better/same/worse*

## Section 5: British Society

The following questions are related to role of Muslim women in British society.

*Please cross out incorrect answers and provide further detail where requested.*

49. Do you feel Muslim women should play a public role in British Society? *Yes/no*

If no, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

50. How do you view the image of Muslim women is perceived by the British population?

*Positive/not sure/negative*

If negative, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

51. How do you view the situation of Muslim women in education and work is depicted by the British media e.g. TV, radio, newspapers? *Fair/not sure/unfair*

If unfair, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

52. Do you feel that the British government has played a sufficient part in ensuring Muslim women in education and work is presented in a positive manner? *Yes/not sure/no*

53. On a scale of 1-5, where 5 is the highest and 1 is lowest; how visible are the efforts of Muslim women and their pursuit of education in British society? *1|2|3|4|5*

54. On a scale of 1-5, where 5 is the highest and 1 is lowest; how visible are the efforts of Muslim women and their pursuit of work and careers in British society? *1|2|3|4|5*

55. What do you perceive as the current level of integration of Muslim women in British society? *High/above average/average/below average/low*

56. In relation to the previous question. Do you believe the cultural or religious practices of Muslim women affect their level of integration in British society? *Yes/no*

57. Are there any areas of British public society where Muslim women are still under-represented? *Yes/no*

If yes, please explain further. \_\_\_\_\_

58. What do you perceive the level of integration of Muslim women in British society will be in the next 10 years? *Higher/same/lower*

59. On a scale of 1-5, where 5 is the highest and 1 is lowest; how important is the role of education in the lives of Muslim women in Britain? *1|2|3|4|5*

60. On a scale of 1-5, where 5 is the highest and 1 is lowest; how important is the role of work in the lives of Muslim women in Britain? *1|2|3|4|5*

## Section 6: Personal details

61. Name (optional): *Specify*\_\_\_\_\_
62. Age: -15/16-20/21-30/31-40/41-50/50+
63. Marital status: *Single/married/divorced/widowed*
64. Number of years in the UK: *Since birth/1-3 yrs/4-10yrs/more than 10 years*
65. Home town: *London/Other: Specify*\_\_\_\_\_
66. Ethnicity: *Bangladeshi/Pakistani/Somali/Other: Specify*\_\_\_\_\_
67. First language: *Bengali/Urdu/Somali/English/Other: Specify*\_\_\_\_\_
68. Would you like a summary of the report? *Yes/no*
69. Would you like to be notified if the report is published? *Yes/no*
70. Your contact details:
- a. Email: *Specify*\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Phone: *Specify*\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Address: *Specify*\_\_\_\_\_

---

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

## Appendix B - Interview Schedule

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Duration:**

**Participant:**

**Researcher:**

---

1. Are you currently in education or work?
2. Are there any cultural, religious or other factors that have supported your pursuit in education or work? If so, what are they?
3. Are there any cultural, religious or other factors that have hindered your pursuit of education or work? If so, what are they?
4. Are Muslim women less likely to progress in education or work due to their religious or cultural views? Why
5. Do you feel Britain provides better opportunities for Muslim women in education and work, than in Muslim countries? Why?
6. Do Muslim communities in the UK promote or hinder Muslim women in their pursuit of education or work? How?
7. Are Muslim women treated less favourably in education and work, compared to Muslim men in the same field, by the Muslim community, educational places, or the job market and employers? In what way?
8. Is English as a foreign or second language an impediment in pursuing education or work, for Muslim women in the UK? In what way?
9. Are Muslim women in the UK pursuing education and work to their potential? How?
10. How important is the role of education and work in the lives of Muslim women in Britain? Why?
11. Do you feel Muslim women have a public role to play in British society? In what way?
12. Are there still areas of British Public society that Muslim women are still under represented? What are they specifically?
13. How do you view the British media portray Muslim women in education and work?
14. How do you view the British population perceive Muslim women in education and work?
15. How do you view the future for Muslim women in Britain, regarding education and work?

## Appendix C - Focus Group Schedule

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Duration:**

**Venue:**

**Participants:**

**Researcher:**

---

1. Are you currently in education or work?
2. Are there any cultural, religious or other factors that have supported your pursuit in education or work? If so, what are they?
3. Are there any cultural, religious or other factors that have hindered your pursuit of education or work? If so, what are they?
4. Are Muslim women less likely to progress in education or work due to their religious or cultural views? Why?
5. Do you feel Britain provides better opportunities for Muslim women in education and work, than in Muslim countries? Why?
6. Do Muslim communities in the UK promote or hinder Muslim women in their pursuit of education or work? How?
7. Do you believe there is a conflict between Western and Islamic cultural values, for Muslim women pursuing education or Work? In what way?
8. Are Muslim women treated less favourably in education and work, compared to Muslim men in the same field, by the Muslim community, educational places, or the job market and employers? In what way?
9. Is English as a foreign or second language an impediment in pursuing education or work, for Muslim women in the UK? In what way?
10. Are Muslim women in the UK pursuing education and work to their potential? How?
11. Do you feel being a Muslim woman enhances or lessens your value in the educational or work environment? In what way?
12. How do you rate your overall experience in education or work? What factors are there?
13. Do you feel Muslim women have a public role to play in British society? In what way?
14. How do you view the British population perceive Muslim women in education and work?
15. How do you view the British media portray Muslim women in education and work?
16. What do you perceive as the levels of integration of Muslim women in British society?

17. Are there still areas of British Public society that Muslim women are still under represented? What are they specifically?
18. How do you view the future for Muslim women in Britain, regarding education and work?
19. What do you view as the main challenges in these fields in the future?
20. How important is the role of education and work in the lives of Muslim women in Britain?

### Appendix D – Data Coding

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency	Comment
Educational Situation				
	Further Educational Aims			Ref Q.5
		Degree	6	
		Other	5	
		Master	5	
		PhD	2	
		Diploma	2	
		NVQ	1	
	Factors that Support Education			Ref Q.6
		Knowledge	5	Seeking Duty
		Religion	4	
		Family	3	
		Opportunity	1	
		Society	1	
	Factors that Hinder Education			Ref Q.7
		Marriage	4	Marrying young
		Homemaker	2	
		Setting	1	Classroom
		Travel	1	
		Time	1	Balancing
	Better Educational Opportunities in the UK	Ref Q.8		
		Britain		
		Access	12	Availability
		Equality	7	Rights
		Law	7	Enforces

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency	Comment	
		Finance	4	Free	
		Qualification	2	Valued	
		Muslim Countries			
		Access	4	Denied	
		Funding	1	Lacking	
		Law	1	Lacking	
		Unsafe	1	Environment	
		Conflict with Western Values (Education)			Ref Q.11
			Religion	7	Expectations
			Dress code	7	Hijab
	Free-mixing		3	Gender	
	Theories		2	Western thought	
	Stereotype		1	By west	
	Values		1	Western	
Ability	1		Lacking		
Marriage	1	Marrying young			
<b>Workplace Situation</b>					
	Further Career Aims			Ref Q.17	
		Higher	6	Not specified	
		Satisfaction	4		
		Specialist	2		
		Teacher	1		
		Judge	1		
		Counsellor	1		
	Factors that Support Work			Ref Q.18	
		Family	8		
		Religion	6		
Community		4			

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency	Comment	
		Opportunity	3		
		Culture	1		
		Language	1		
	Factors that Hinder Work				Ref Q.19
		Family	4		Hijab
		Discrimination	4		
		Culture	3		
		Dress-code	3		
		Setting	2		
		Motherhood	1		
		Homemaker	1		
		Opportunity	1		
		Religion	1		
	Better Career Opportunities in the UK				Ref Q.20
		Britain			
	Opportunity	15		Hijab Religion Gender	
	Access	10			
	Equality	6			
	Freedom	4			
	Acceptability	3			
	Dress-code	2			
	Restricted	2			
	Free-mixing	1			
Muslim Countries					
	Opportunity	5		Limited	
	Rights	4		Denied	
	Family	3			

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency	Comment	
		Homemaker	2		
		Culture	2		
		Stereotype	1		
		Equality	1	Lacking	
		Freedom	1	Lacking	
	Conflict with Western Values (Work)				Ref Q.23
			Western Values	6	Un-Islamic
			Free-mixing	5	Gender
			Dress-code	4	Hijab
			Family	4	
			Religion	3	Prayer
			Yes	3	Not specified
			Equality	2	Gender
Homemaker			2		
Role	2	Commitment			
Oppression	1				
Challenges faced in Education					
	Less Progress in Education			Ref Q.25	
			Marriage	4	
			Culture	4	
			Dress-code	3	Hijab
			Religion	2	
			Free-mixing	2	Gender
			Yes	2	Not specified
			Family	1	
			Discrimination	1	
			Oppression	1	
Impediments by Educational Institutes				Ref Q.29	

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency	Comment	
		Dress-code	4	Hijab	
		Yes	3	Not specified	
		Religion	2		
		Finance	2	Fees	
		Discrimination	1		
	Other factors that hinder education				Ref Q.30
			Family	6	
			Free-mixing	4	Gender
			Motivation	4	Lacking
			Finance	3	Lacking
			Marriage	3	
			Culture	3	
			Motherhood	2	
			Travel	2	
Choice			2	Subjects	
Employment			1		
Dress-code	1				
Discrimination	1				
Challenges faced in Work					
	Less Progress in Work				Ref Q.37
			Family	5	
			Yes	4	Not specified
			Religion	4	
			Culture	4	
			Free-mixing	3	Gender
			Stereotype	2	
			Socialising	2	

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency	Comment	
		Travel	2	Lacking Western	
		Opportunity	1		
		Values	1		
	Impediments by Job Place				Ref Q.41
			Discrimination	4	Hijab Not specified Hours Responsibility
			Dress-code	4	
			Yes	4	
			Time	3	
			Religion	3	
			Stereotype	2	
			Role	1	
	Other factors that hinder work				Ref Q.43
			Dress code	5	Hijab Hours Male Commitment Un-Islamic
			Religion	4	
			Family	2	
Time			2		
Discrimination			2		
Marriage			1		
Stereotype			1		
Culture			1		
Oppression			1		
Role			1		
Uniform			1		
British Society					
	No Public Role				
	Ref Q.49				
		Dress-code	3	Hijab	
Homemaker		1			
	Family	1			

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency	Comment
Other Education and Work Issues		Reputation	1	Honour
	British Public's Perception			Ref Q.50
		Oppression	16	Hijab
		Positive	12	
		Discrimination	6	
		Stereotype	4	
		Voiceless	3	
		Uneducated	2	
		Dress-code	2	
		Homemaker	1	
	British Media's Depiction			Ref Q.51
		Misrepresented	13	
		Oppression	10	
		Negative	5	
		Stereotype	3	
		Positive	2	
		Homemaker	1	
	Public Area's Under-represented			Ref Q.57
		Politics	12	
		Business	6	
	Education	6		
	Media	5		
	Law	4		
	Manual	2		
	Entertainment	2		
	Medicine	1		
	Community	1		

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency
	Muslim Community Support		Ref Q.10 & Q.22
	Positive	3	Area Hijab
	Logistics	2	
	Dress-code	2	
	Culture	1	
	Homemaker	1	
	English Language		Ref Q.31 & Q.42
	Opportunity	4	Lacking
	Difficult	3	
	Favouring Men		Ref Q.32 & Q.44
	Stereotype	5	Fair
	Equality	3	
	Homemaker	3	
	Oppression	1	
	Potential Opportunities		Ref Q.9 & Q.21
	Family	5	Expense
	Laziness	2	
	Marriage	1	
	Finance	1	
	Future Challenges		Ref New
	Opportunity	5	
	Discrimination	1	
	Stereotype	1	

## Appendix E - Tables & Figures

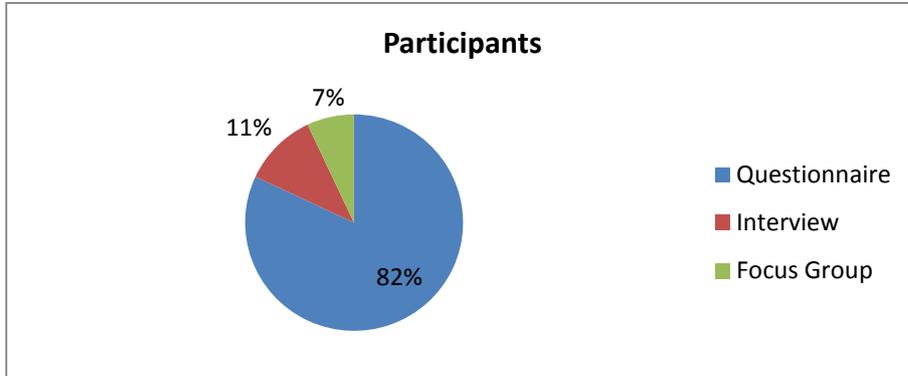


Figure 1 Participants

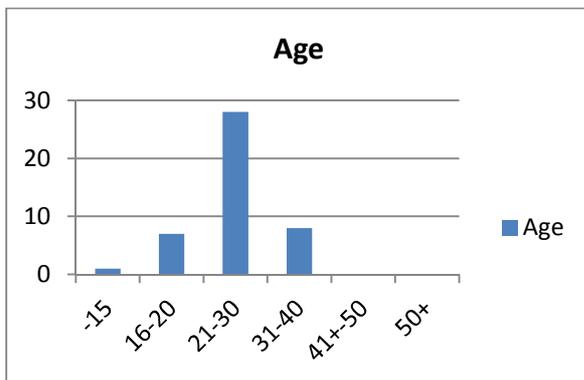


Figure 2 Age

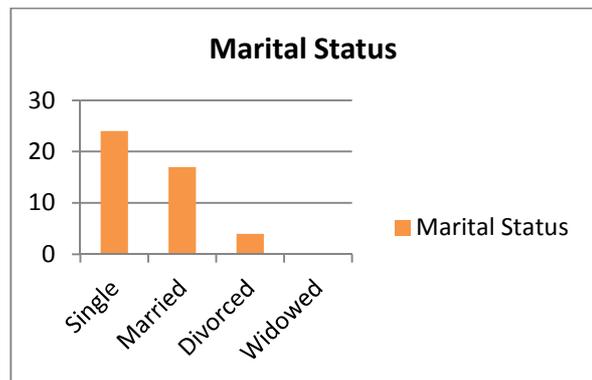


Figure 3 Marital Status

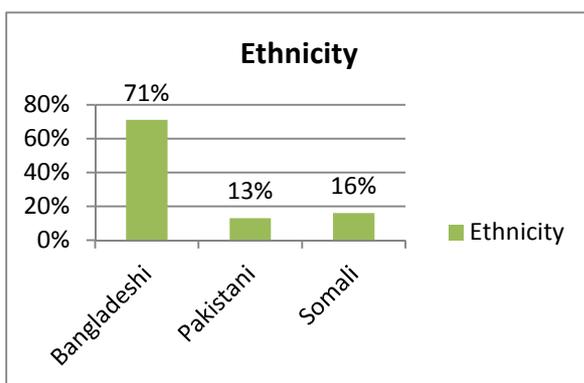


Figure 4 Ethnicity

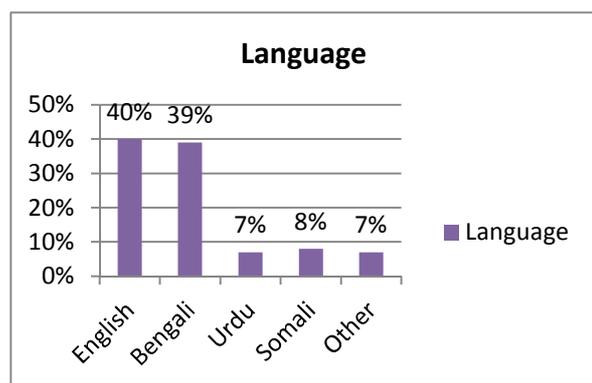
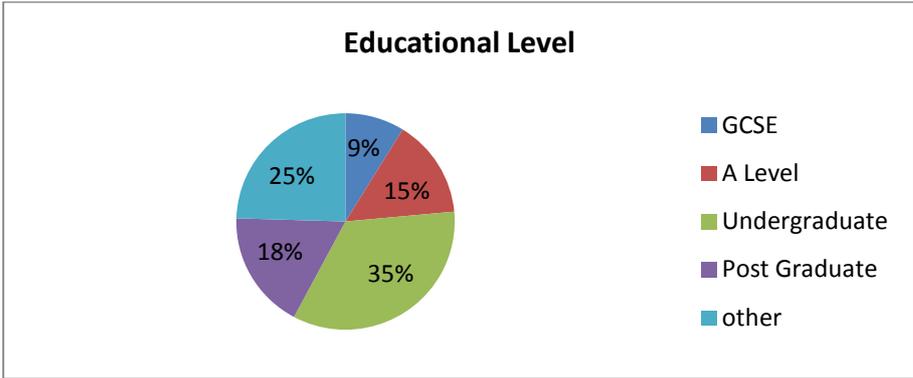
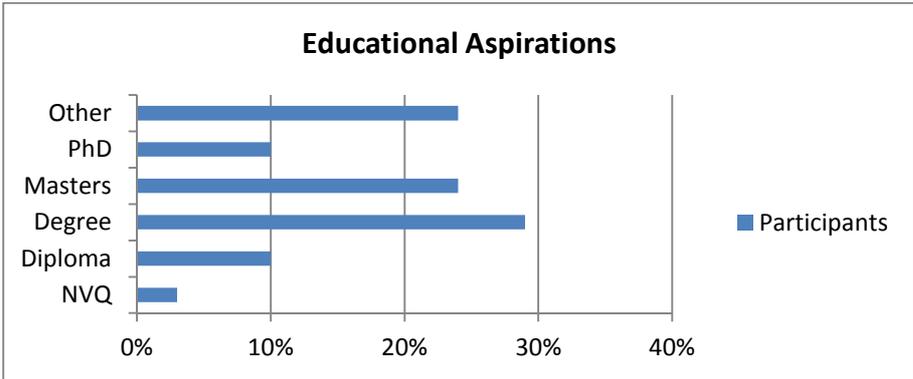


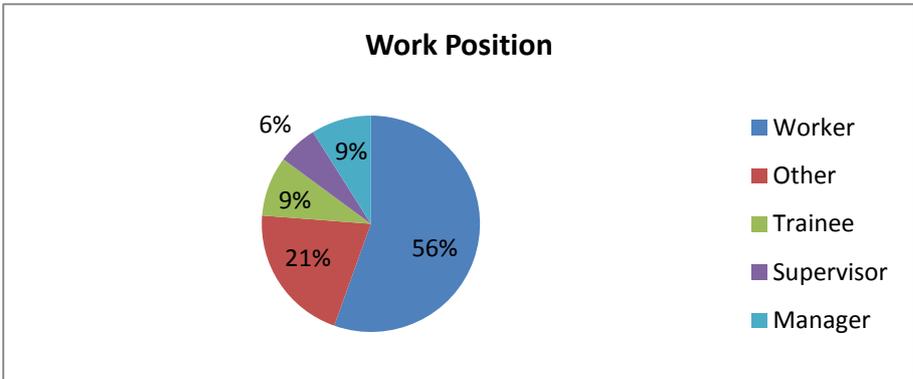
Figure 5 Language



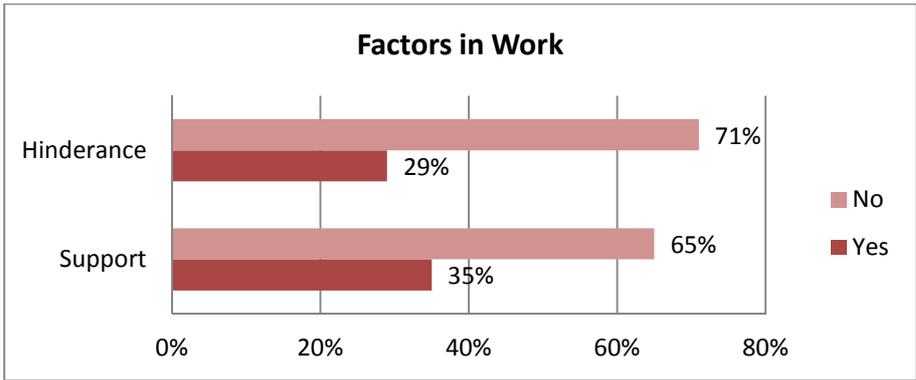
**Figure 6 Educational Level**



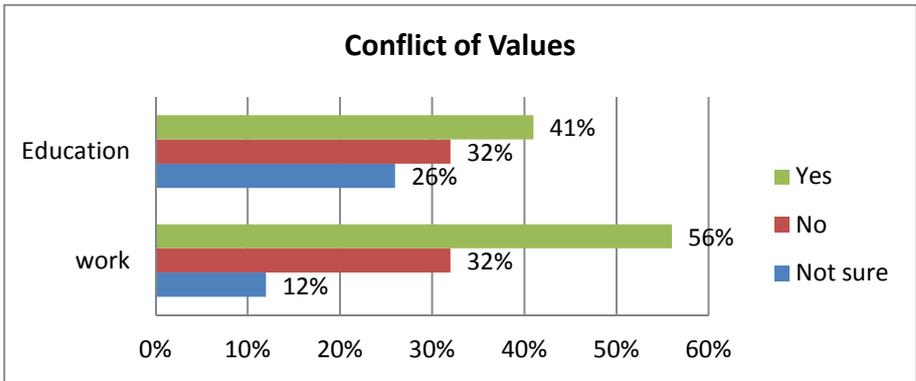
**Figure 7 Educational Aspirations**



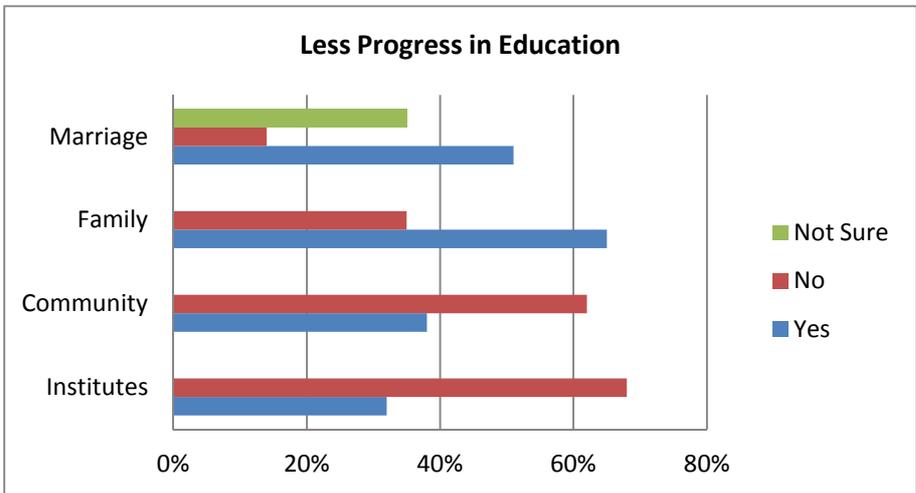
**Figure 8 Work Position**



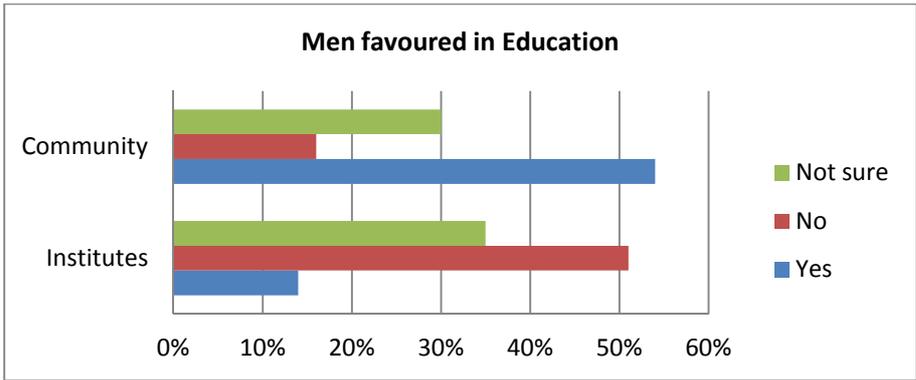
**Figure 9 Factors in Work**



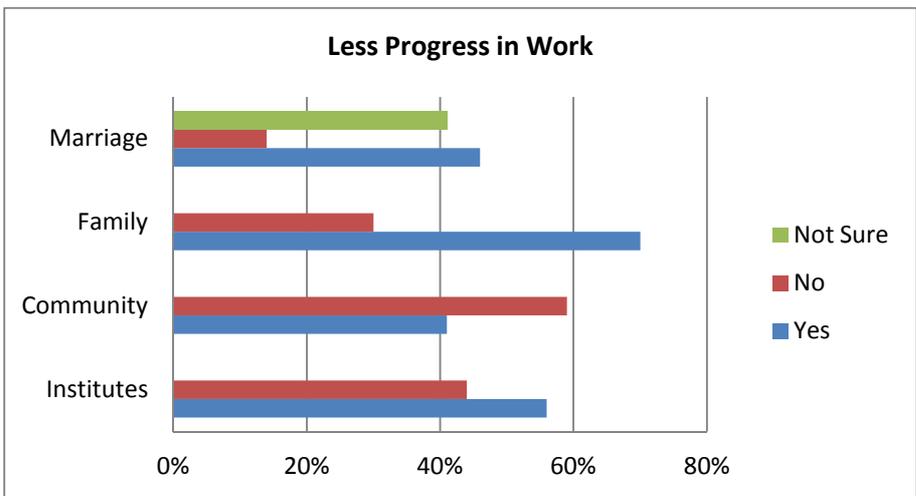
**Figure 10 Conflict of Values**



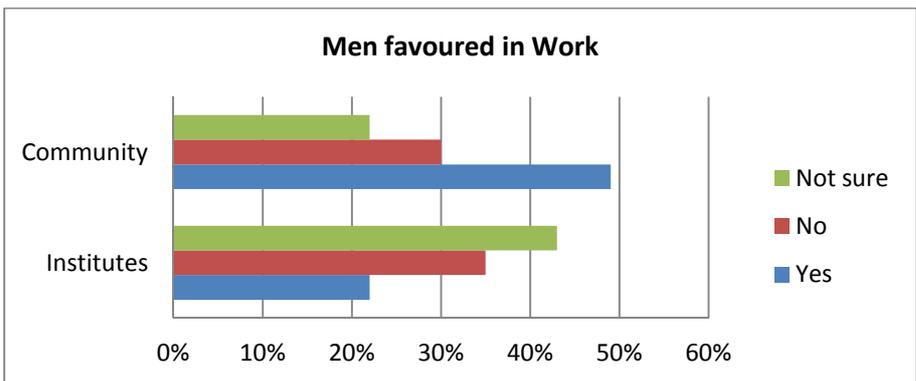
**Figure 11 Less Progress in Education**



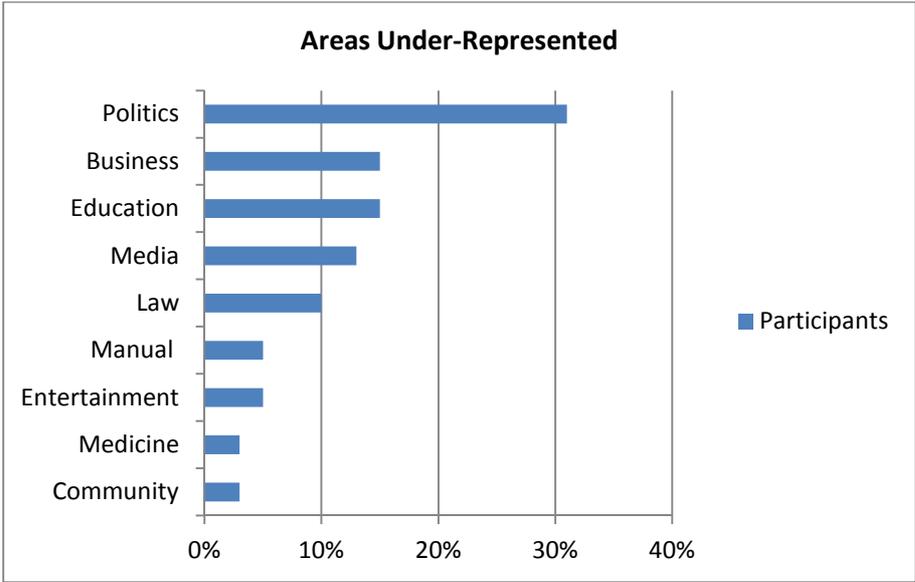
**Figure 12 Men favoured in Education**



**Figure 13 Less Progress in work**



**Figure 14 Men favoured in Work**



**Figure 15 Areas Under-Represented**