

The Impact of Islamophobia on the Mental Health of Muslim Post-Secondary Students

Major Research Paper

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BACKGROUND

Canada is praised for its multiculturalism and diversity. However, throughout history, minority populations like Black, Indigenous and other People of Colour (BIPOC) have faced disadvantages and discrimination. This Major Research Paper (MRP) delves into the prejudice that Muslim women attending York University face, how it impacts their mental health, and how policymaking can improve the lives of this population. Since immigration policy shifts that began in 1967, the diversity of the Canadian population has increased. While in the 1970s and 1980s, immigrants were primarily Europeans practising Christianity, in recent years, almost half of all immigrants have come from Asia, Africa and the Middle East (Short, 2018). According to the 2011 Statistics Canada report, 387,590 immigrants identified as Muslim in comparison to the 210,680 Muslim individuals who first immigrated in 2000 (Short, 2018). The Canadian National Household Survey (NHS) in 2011 measured the demographics of the Canadian population (Shah, 2019). This survey reported that Muslim Canadians consisted 3.1% of the national population in 2011. The prevalence of Muslim Canadian residents in Ontario is highest (4.6%), followed by Alberta (3.2%) and Quebec (3.1%) (Shah, 2019). According to NHS data, first and second-generation Muslim Canadians have higher education levels than Canadians of other religious beliefs (Short, 2018). Nevertheless, Muslims experience greater religious-based, ethnic-based, gendered, and language-based discrimination than others. Muslim women are more prone to religious and gendered-based discrimination than men, particularly while at school and accessing public services (Short, 2018). The NHS survey data highlighted that a quarter of Muslims underwent difficulty when travelling, particularly crossing borders and using airports (Short, 2018). According to Statistics Canada, rates of hate crimes increased by 47% overall, but hate

crimes specifically targeting Muslims increased by 151% (National Council of Canadian Muslims, 2018).

Hate crimes against Muslims are considered a form of Islamophobia, which is operationalized in multiple ways (Bleich, 2011). According to the 1997 Runnymede Trust Report, Islamophobia is "a way of referring to the dread or hatred of Islam, and therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims." The report also considers Islamophobia as both practical consequences of discrimination against Muslims and the exclusion of Muslims in society (Bleich, 2011). Generally, authors such as Lee et al. (2009) and Abbas (2004) define Islamophobia as the fear of Muslims. Furthermore, Stolz (2005) conceptualizes Islamophobia as the rejection of Muslims, or Islam as a whole, including actions like violence (Stolz, 2005). For the purpose of this MRP, I will operationalize Islamophobia similarly to Stolz's method, in which Muslims are discriminated against due to their religion and can undergo physical or emotional abuse, micro-aggressions, verbal abuse, and harmful stereotypes and propaganda.

Legislation in Canada has failed to address Islamophobia and protect the lives of Muslims. In some cases, it has made it worse. Specifically, Quebec Bill 21, *An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State*, was passed in June 2019 and has contributed to prejudice against Muslims (National Assembly of Quebec, 2019). This Act prohibits state employees such as teachers, police officers and prosecutors from wearing religious symbols or head and face coverings in their employment. Muslims, who often wear religious garments like the hijab and abaya, are targeted by this Act and are prevented from employment while practising their religion. Bill 21 was passed on the basis of maintaining religious neutrality, state laicity and supposedly advocating for the human rights, freedom and equality of citizens (National Assembly of Quebec, 2019). Despite the pretense of advocating for equality, this law denies the

rights of Muslims wishing to practise their religion openly. It also provides the state with the power to determine what is classified as religious symbols (Patrick et al., 2019). The Bill attempts to dictate when/where religious symbols can be worn. Under this assumption, religion can be separated from personal identity depending on the context. This is untrue, especially when religions like Islam fail to adhere to the social norms as those who practise it are visibly different through their religious garments and incorporate Islam into all aspects of their lives (Patrick et al., 2019). Scholars argue that this Bill uses the perspective of a liberal Christian as providing appropriate guidelines for other religions. Thus, legislation like Bill 21 uses secularism to strip the rights of Muslims by preventing them from practising their faith (Patrick et al., 2019).

Similarly, Quebec Bill 62, *An Act to Foster Adherence to State Religious Neutrality and, in Particular, to Provide a Framework for Requests for Accommodations on Religious Grounds in Certain Bodies*, is used to ban face coverings like the niqab. It was decreed that under this act, employees working in the public sector are prohibited from wearing face coverings (National Assembly of Quebec, 2017). This was passed based on the claim that Quebec is a democratic, inclusive society, where the State of Quebec reflects its history, and religious neutrality must be prioritized. Thus, Muslim women wearing the niqab must refrain from practising their religion while on public transit, in school boards, government departments, municipalities, public institutions, and having careers as physicians, peace officers, members of government and more (National Assembly of Quebec, 2017). Like Bill 21, this ban explicitly targets Muslim women, as women wearing the niqab are denied their right to access public space despite being citizens (Razack, 2018). While cowering behind religious neutrality, this law restrains them from practising their religion to the full extent, thus making it unattainable to be a practising Muslim

in today's society. It uses legislation to force authority over Muslim women and excludes them rather than protecting them.

Shortly after the Quebec mosque shooting of 2017, the House of Commons passed an anti-Islamophobia motion that recognized the increased amount of prejudice against Muslims and condemned Islamophobia and all forms of systemic discrimination. This motion, however, exposed divisive opinions among politicians (Khelifa, 2017). While Liberals and NDPs backed the motion, it was met with resistance by Conservative politicians. Some individuals, like David Anderson, were opposed to the word "Islamophobia" due to the personal opinion that it was undefined (Khelifa, 2017). Others like Kelly Leitch believed that no religion should receive special privileges. It was also the opinion of Pierre Lemieux that Islamophobia was not an issue in Canada (Khelifa, 2017). Despite challenges from Conservative politicians, this motion was passed, thus institutionalizing the need to protect Muslim individuals in Canada.

In this MRP, I highlight Canadian literature on Islamophobia, identify gaps and introduce the qualitative experiences of Muslim women who were victims of Islamophobia. I will identify, using Google Scholar, articles using the search words Islamophobia and Canada. Martin-Martin and colleagues (2018) show Google Scholar™ "finds significantly more citations than the WoS Core Collection and Scopus across all subject areas" (p. 1175). Most importantly, Google Scholar surpasses Web of Science and Scopus in its coverage of literature in the social sciences and humanities. I couple this with five qualitative, semi-structured interviews with Muslim women attending York University. This MRP aims to make explicit the adverse mental health outcomes that Muslims undergo after experiencing discrimination. Political ideologies, legislation, and more have contributed to increases in Islamophobia in Canada. I will explore the literature in the subsequent section to further highlight research conducted on this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamophobic Attitudes within Canada

Anti-minority attitudes are common within Canada and increasing, especially towards Muslims. The General Social Survey of Canada in 2014 reported 330,000 hatred-motivated criminal incidents among minorities in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2021). When considering Islamophobia, police-reported incidents of 2016 reveal that 33% of all hate crimes in Canada occurred against Muslims (Gaudet, 2018). From 2012 to 2015, hate crimes against Muslims increased by 253% in Canada (Minsky, 2017). The province of Quebec has seen many such instances. Mosques and Islamic Centres have been defaced by graffiti, threats and violence (Short, 2018). Throughout recent years, mosques have been vandalized with pig's blood in particular, and in 2016, a decapitated pig's head was left outside of the Centre Culturel Islamique de Quebec (Short, 2018). In 2017, six Muslim men were killed in a Quebec City mosque shooting by a White nationalist terrorist. This was labelled as the worst mass murder in a place of worship in Canada's history (Zine, 2021). While there have been countless instances of Islamophobia throughout the years, a recent act of Islamophobia on June 8, 2021, in London, Ontario, left four Muslims murdered and one 9-year-old child orphaned (Zine, 2021). In a targeted act of terror, the Afzal family was run over and killed while going on a walk by a White nationalist individual who is being tried for first-degree murder (Zine, 2021).

Scholarly literature has determined the prevalence of Islamophobia in Canada. Data collected from a Gallup Poll concluded that anti-Muslim opinions were more likely to be present in Canada than in Europe. In fact, scholars have suggested that Islamophobic beliefs are more severe than expected in Canada (MacDonald, 2015). When considering the Canadian provinces, a 2018 research study by Wilkins-Laflamme determined where Islamophobic attitudes were

more prominent from a geographical perspective (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018). This research also aimed to highlight groups of individuals among the Canadian society who would likely have Islamophobic perceptions. While the highest rates of Islamophobia occurred in Atlantic Canada, Anti-Muslim attitudes were also evident among those living in Quebec, specifically in older, less educated, and conservative individuals. This was also comparable to the 2009 Angus Reid Poll, which reported that 69% of individuals living in Quebec had a negative perception of Islam (MacDonald, 2015). Further research based in Quebec tested Islamophobic attitudes towards Arab Muslims, Arab Non-Muslims, and Haitian immigrants after 9/11 (Rousseau et al., 2011). The authors concluded that rates of perceived discrimination increased by 20% among all groups after 9/11. Out of all ethnic groups in this study, Muslim Arab Canadians were the only group to experience psychological distress due to prejudice after 9/11 (Rousseau et al., 2011).

Research conducted by Barkdull and colleagues studied the experiences of Muslims from Western countries like Canada, the USA, Australia and Argentina (Barkdull et al., 2011). Canadian Muslims were victims of Islamophobia after 9/11 and shared their perception of the media's role in contributing to Islamophobia. Canadian participants believed that mainstream media in Canada was well-balanced compared to the United States and claimed that the US media was more damaging to Muslims than in Canada (Barkdull et al., 2011).

Global Events Affecting Canadian Muslims

The aftermath of the 9/11 World Trade Centre attack severely impacted Muslims in North America (Perry and Poynting, 2006). Not only American but Canadian Muslims have been impacted by discrimination and Islamophobia. The Canadian Islamic Congress reported a 1600% increase in Islamophobic hate crimes in the year 2003 alone. Additionally, the Canadian Council

on American Islamic Relations (CAIR-CAN) surveyed Muslim Canadians in 2004 to determine that over half of them experienced an Islamophobic incident since 9/11. Thus, 9/11 increased the discrimination against Muslims in Canada (Perry and Poynting, 2006). An interesting finding in a 2008 Canadian study by Caidi and MacDonald on Muslim students found that, similarly to existing literature, many participants became closer to religion after 9/11. In contrast, participants felt uncomfortable when playing sports or keeping their beards after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Caidi and MacDonald, 2008).

In terms of the changes they faced in their personal lives, many Muslims were victims of name-calling, specifically being referred to as terrorists, like Al-Qaeda or Osama Bin Laden, due to 9/11 (Caidi and MacDonald, 2008). Additionally, 93% of Muslim students agreed that they saw a difference in how the media portrayed Arabs and/or Muslims since 9/11 (Caidi and MacDonald, 2008). In qualitative interviews, some students believed that Westerners were ignorant and that there was less coverage of world events in Canada. They also stated that the news lacked relevant information (Caidi and MacDonald, 2008). Furthermore, 60% of Muslim participants questioned their role and place in Canadian society after 9/11. In comparison to other Western countries, participants favoured Canada more as a place of residence than the USA, and 67.3% of individuals disagreed with a statement proposed by researchers that asked if they thought about leaving Canada. According to the qualitative interviews, participants believed that there was more discrimination present in the US than in Canada and that border crossing in the US was difficult (Caidi and MacDonald, 2008). Some participants also described that they were happier living in Canada than in other countries like the US, the UK, and Europe (Caidi and MacDonald, 2008).

The 2016 election of a Republican President, Donald Trump, in the US with anti-immigration and anti-Muslim stances led to another wave of Islamophobia. In 2017, Donald Trump attempted to block travellers into the USA from Muslim countries, such as Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and Iraq, even if they had US residence visas (Houghton, 2017). Since the Trump presidency, acts of discrimination, especially among Muslim women, have increased in the US through hate crimes and negative stereotypes (Jamal, 2017). What is coined the *Trump Effect* by scholars has been documented in Canada as well. Following Donald Trump's victory in 2017, increased acts of prejudice, discrimination and violence occurred in Canada (Perry and Scrivens, 2019). Specifically, Trump's negative attitudes towards Muslims, Blacks, Latinos, and those in the LTBTQ+ community influenced the prevalence of hate crimes in Canada. This was evident when immediately after the US Presidential election, mosques, synagogues, Jewish prayer houses, and a church with a Black minister in Canada were defaced and vandalized with slurs, swastikas, and white-supremacy symbols (Perry and Scrivens, 2019). Trump's influence on the normalization of Islamophobia in Canadian society was apparent when a white extremist Trump supporter murdered six Muslim men and injured 19 other individuals in a Quebec mosque (Perry and Scrivens, 2019). This terrorist was photographed wearing a "Make America Great Again" hat. Although Donald Trump was elected President in the USA, his discriminatory campaign encouraged Islamophobic and racist attitudes in Canada (Perry and Scrivens, 2019).

Canadian Military Involvement in the Muslim World

Following 9/11, Canada has continued to have a robust military presence in various Muslim countries. For a decade, Canadian troops have been deployed to Afghanistan, with the

military involvement costing \$11-12 billion dollars (Kirkey and Ostroy, 2010). As an ally to the United States, Canada supported the US in their "War on Terror", which aimed to locate al Qaeda. However, the human costs of post 9/11 wars can overshadow its benefits. The number of civilians killed in Afghanistan, a Muslim majority country, in 2018 was described as one of the highest death tolls in the ongoing wars (Crawford, 2018). While these deaths were undercounted, there were 38,480 direct civilian casualties from 2001 to 2018 in Afghanistan (Crawford, 2018). Indirect deaths due to war, such as lack of access to food, water, electricity, health services, and infrastructure, were unable to be determined. Similar trends followed in other Muslim countries like Pakistan and Iraq. From 2001 to 2018, 23,372 Pakistani civilians were killed, and there were 182,272 to 204,575 civilian deaths in Iraq from 2003 to 2018 (Crawford, 2018). While the United States and its allies have attempted to reduce civilian casualties, there has been a considerable amount of damage to the citizens of Muslim countries. Post 9/11 wars have also led to increases in Muslim refugees and displaced individuals in war zones (Crawford, 2018). The war in Afghanistan led to 2.61 million refugees in 2017, while 1.84 million individuals were internally displaced. Canada and the United States, along with other allies, have aimed to fight terrorism, but the consequences of these wars have been detrimental to innocent Muslim civilians (Crawford, 2018).

The invasion of militants in the Muslim world has led to damage, trauma, and the horrific human cost of war, leading to the deaths of civilians, allied troops, opposition fighters and humanitarian workers. Thus, military involvement in the Muslim world directly targets innocent Muslims, portrays Muslims as the enemy, and even fosters anti-Muslim attitudes. When Canadian and United States governments retaliated against the Muslim world post 9/11 in their supposed War on Terror, it affected innocent Muslim lives and created the narrative that the

Muslim world and its citizens, including countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria were dangerous. In turn, this contributed to the association between Islam and terrorism, when only Muslim countries were invaded under the War on Terror.

Harm to Muslim civilians can also be observed through the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. While previously attempting to remain neutral, Canada's relationship with Israel post 9/11, and under the regime of Stephen Harper became more evident and supportive (Abu-Laban and Bakan, 2012). In Palestine, there has been forceful removal of Palestinian citizens to create Israeli settlements. Palestinians have been prevented from returning to their homes, have been denied citizenship, and due to the Israeli blockade of Gaza, experience poor living conditions (Falk and Tilley, 2017). The violence between Palestinian and Israeli armed forces has affected citizens of both countries (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Religion comes into play when considering that the majority of individuals in Palestine practise Islam, whereas Israel is a Jewish state, and both religions value the symbolism of Jerusalem as a holy site. Palestine, however, has been a birthplace for major religions and has been home to civilizations like the Egyptians, Persians, Babylonians, and Greeks (Mostafa, 2018). Thus, it can be argued that this conflict represents a divide between Jewish individuals and Muslim Arabs. While there was an internationally sponsored Peace Agreement between Palestine and Israel, Israel has aimed to colonize the West Bank through illegal expansion and infrastructural change (Browne, 2021).

Canada's pro-Israeli stance was evident through Venezuela's expulsion of the Israeli ambassador due to Israel's invasion of Gaza in 2008 (Abu-Laban and Bakan, 2012). When the Venezuelan government expelled the Israeli ambassador, Canada took over Israel's diplomatic interests in Venezuela, thus acting as a representative of the Israeli state (Abu-Laban and Bakan,

2012). Canada was also the only country to vote against a UN Human Rights Council Resolution to condemn the military operation of the Israeli attack on Gaza in 2008 (Abu-Laban and Bakan, 2012). Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper was also accused of cutting ties with any foreign group that criticized Israel.

Settler violence against Palestinians has increased in recent years. In 2020, Israeli authorities demolished 568 Palestinian homes in the West Bank and at least 2,001 Palestinian civilians were wounded by Israeli police forces (Human Rights Watch, 2021). However, in Canada, political parties remain divided on this issue. It was reported that Canada sent \$13.7 million in military goods and technology to Israel in 2019, and Jagmeet Singh, leader of the New Democratic Party in Canada, called for the Canadian government to stop arms sales to Israel (Reynolds, 2021). On the other hand, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau supported Israel's alleged rights to self-defence and stated that all sides should end violence (Reynolds, 2021). The Canadian government's lack of support for Palestinians can affect the well-being of Muslim Palestinians living in Canada as they observe the mistreatment and lack of empathy for individuals in their home country.

Thus, Canada's direct and indirect foreign involvement can be observed through the thousands of civilian deaths in Muslim majority countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Palestine post 9/11. Canada contributes to oppression in the Muslim world by supporting allies like the United States and Israel, which ultimately leads to the downfall of Muslim countries. This creates a disadvantageous image of Muslims, who are portrayed as the enemy and target of the Canadian government.

Mental Health of Canadian Muslims Experiencing Islamophobia

Considering Islamophobic attitudes in Canada, researchers studied their potential adverse mental effects upon Muslims in Canada (Ali, 2020). It was concluded that perceived Islamophobia predicts psychological distress, where having a Canadian identity can be a protective factor for distress. A similar study conducted by Rousseau and colleagues (2011) compared the perception of discrimination among Arab and Haitian immigrants in Montreal (Rousseau et al., 2011). The purpose of their research was to compare post 9/11 impacts on discrimination in Canada to determine the effect on mental well-being and psychological distress (Rousseau et al., 2011). Using cross-sectional data collected from samples recruited in 1998 and 2007, Rousseau and colleagues determined that both Arabs and Haitians were impacted by discrimination. However, the effect of discrimination only led to an increased amount of psychological distress observed in Muslim Arab participants in 2007 rather than in 1998 (Rousseau et al., 2011). This confirms the link between religious discrimination and challenges to the mental well-being of Muslim Canadians and indicates the increase in psychological distress that Muslim Arabs experienced after 9/11.

A few studies consider how youth mental health, in particular, is impacted by Islamophobia. Elkassem and colleagues interviewed Canadian youth to determine the role that religious discrimination plays in their lives (Elkassem et al., 2018). Youth participants between the grades of six and eight discussed the portrayal of Muslims and the perception of Muslims in society. Students constantly felt judged, emphasized the media's double standards, and shed light on how others associated their religion with terrorism (Elkassem et al., 2018). Muslim youth in this study were victims of religious oppression through microaggressions and verbal abuse but remained resilient and hopeful (Elkassem et al., 2018). Further research needs to be conducted in

Canada to advocate for Muslim individuals, especially youth, who face challenges to their mental well-being due to discriminatory acts against them.

Gendered Islamophobia in Canada

Islamophobia impacts Muslim women in particular due to complex intersections of their various identities, such as their gender, religion and ethnicity/race. They are affected by their status as women, the challenges they experience when accessing education, and challenges accessing financial, health and social resources (Abu-Ras and Suarez, 2009). Muslim immigrant women are specifically affected by social exclusion due to language barriers and unfair power dynamics (Abu-Ras and Suarez, 2009). Furthermore, due to their religious garbs like the hijab (headscarf), niqab (veil) or abaya (full-length dress), Muslim women are particularly impacted by Islamophobia as they are easily and visibly identifiable as Muslim. This is not often seen in their male counterparts (Abu-Ras and Suarez, 2009). Thus, Muslim women are often stereotyped as outsiders, oppressed, and are perceived as anti-Canadian (Perry, 2014).

Gendered Islamophobia, particularly experienced by Muslim women, has been evident throughout Canadian history, especially in Quebec (Zine, 2006). Quebec has a similar stance to France on the issues of the hijab and veiling due to the notion that it attacked both female liberty and nationalism (Zine, 2006). In 1994, a 12-year-old girl in Quebec was expelled from school due to her hijab. Quebec had previously banned hijabs in public schools but was overturned by the government, unlike in France (Syed, 2012). However, it has passed Bill 21 and 62, banning religious symbols, headscarves and face coverings in certain areas of employment and public spaces. Thus, Islamophobia is specifically evident towards women, and scholars in Canada have investigated its effects on the well-being of women.

Muslim women residing in Waterloo, ON, were interviewed about their experiences as minorities undergoing discrimination (Hunt et al., 2020). Hunt and colleagues found that they experienced low self-esteem, social exclusion and isolation, and struggled with their identity after being exposed to Islamophobia and discrimination (Hunt et al., 2020). This study also highlighted the impact of gendered Islamophobia, where young Muslim girls were particularly impacted by discrimination due to their hijab

Similarly, a research study with women attending Islamic schools in the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario looked at their experiences wearing a hijab or veil (Zine, 2006). Many of the young Muslim women experienced Islamophobia and racism while using the public transit system. In addition, participants discussed the discrimination they faced when wearing Islamic clothing such as the abaya. They chose not to wear the abaya in certain instances due to the fear of being discriminated against (Zine, 2006). Participants also reported instances of verbal abuse as the veil portrayed them as foreigners. Muslim women experienced social rejection by society, were affected by stereotypes, witnessed an increased amount of surveillance post 9/11, and faced the rejection of their Canadian identity. Participants also felt a sense of security and safety while being enrolled in an Islamic school, as they could practice their faith comfortably without being judged or excluded (Zine, 2006). These Muslim women experienced gendered Islamophobia due to their visible practising of Islam. Therefore, Zine's research is relevant as it focuses on a population not well studied in the literature.

MRP Objectives

The literature clearly indicates an association between Islamophobia and adverse mental health outcomes in Canada, where there has been an increase in Islamophobic acts against

Muslims. Muslim women are at high risk of discrimination due to the visibility of their religious attire. However, there is a gap in the literature on how Islamophobia may impact younger women attending university institutions. The objective of this MRP is to understand the perspectives of female Canadian university students' experiences of Islamophobia and its impact on their mental health outcomes. The interview topics for the qualitative study of these experiences will inquire into their experiences/observations of overt or covert discrimination based on religion, perceived mental and social impacts at personal and community levels, and recommendations for inclusive policymaking and programs. The generated knowledge may help inform policymaking in health and social care systems for improving the health of a vulnerable Canadian community.

METHODOLOGY

This section provides details on the researcher's worldview and the methods used for data collection and analysis.

Research Paradigm

A critical social science lens informs my research, and as such, I examine the impact of Islamophobia on the mental health outcomes of a sample of female Canadian Muslims attending university. Critical social science (CSS) challenges the status quo by examining power dynamics with an overarching goal of social justice. This approach aims to enable social transformation and improving equity by enabling human agency (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). It sees these processes as shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values (historically situated reality, ontology). The overarching aim of scholars following the CSS

worldview is to improve the lives of individuals who are often overlooked by society (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

As a primary concern of CSS is to consider the role that power dynamics play in society, an important conceptual tool employed by them is the concept of privilege (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005). To advocate for human agency, CSS aims to uncover how those in positions of power prevent others from gaining control of their own lives. Thus, CSS is concerned with how ideologies impact culture, meanings, and representations that "produce a consent" to the status quo (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005). According to this perspective, culture epitomizes an area of struggle and can be used to understand how populations are oppressed. The role of CSS is to understand that the dominant ideological practice of society can shape reality (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005). CSS scholars also challenge society's social structures, which are classified as oppressive (Harvey, 1990). It is important to question how social systems work and how history and various ideologies contribute to the oppression of minorities (Harvey, 1990).

This approach highlights the political structure against forces of oppression, and an aim is to determine how to improve society (Harvey, 1990). Furthermore, CSS has intrinsic values of morality, hope for social transformation, and values the voices of both researchers and participants (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). In CSS, phenomena are analyzed by considering their historical aspects and their relation to oppressive social structures (Harvey, 1990). Thus, these concepts and phenomena are deconstructed (Harvey, 1990). The CSS paradigm informs my research to consider how female Muslim university students have been disadvantaged in society due to Islamophobic attitudes. I have a personal interest in aiming to improve the health of Muslims, a religious group that I identify with. By first understanding how society's cultural and

political aspects have failed Muslims, leading to Islamophobia, a CSS perspective can be used to advocate for social justice.

Qualitative Interviews

I gathered the perspectives of female Muslim university students through semi-structured, one-on-one, qualitative interviews (Magnusson & Marecek, 2018). Qualitative, semi-structured interviews can gather in-depth information about the experiences and perspectives of individuals. This is unlike quantitative methods, which are often used to gather scientific explanations and test specific, concrete hypotheses. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow researchers to ask additional questions that emerge to foster the gathering of rich, holistic and contextualized information from participants (Rabionet, 2011). The interpretive interview approach – consistent with CSS -- as described by Magnusson and Marecek (2018) was applied. Interpretative research consists of loosely structured interviews that promote participants' personal stories and perspectives in the study. Furthermore, using an interpretative research lens to conduct semi-structured interviews involved asking open-ended questions regarding participants' experiences and engaging them through probes to elicit deeper conversations. Ethics approval was acquired from York University prior to data collection.

Sampling Approach

For the scope of this MRP, I *purposive* sampled participants who had experienced or closely observed Islamophobia (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016). I conducted five in-depth qualitative interviews.

Participant Eligibility

In order to participate in the study, I identified women who saw themselves as Muslim women aged 18-30 years and enrolled at York University as undergraduate or graduate students. They needed to be proficient in the English language. As noted, I sought those with experiences or observations of incidents of Islamophobia -- defined as verbal or physical abuse, micro-aggressions, name-calling, cyberbullying, or other hate crimes -- among close family or friends in Canada. Given the COVID-19 social distancing policy, the interviews were organized using Zoom requiring access to electronic devices. The process of informed consent was completed prior to data collection; recruitment details are provided below.

Approach to Recruitment

A study flyer was developed and was circulated via multiple avenues. Due to COVID-19 protocols, many students are completing virtual classes; henceforth, the flyer was disseminated electronically, first through personal connections and then through the associates of a professor at York University. The potential participants contacted the primary researcher via the email provided on the flyer. Those who contacted the researcher were provided with details, and the consent form was sent electronically to those who expressed willingness to participate. This allowed them adequate time to make an informed decision about voluntary participation in an approximately 60-minute long online or phone interview with permission to audio record the conversation. Each participant was offered a \$15 electronic gift card to Tim Hortons as an honorarium along with a Resource Guide about community-based health and social care resources.

Interview Guide and Rapport Building

The interview guide consisted of open-ended interview questions with attention paid to the wording of questions for sensitivity and simplicity. According to Magnusson and Marecek (2018), interviews should allow the participants to feel relaxed by using informal language and gradually introducing sensitive topics. Such an interview style is more likely to generate rich conversations about the stories and experiences of individuals who experienced or observed incidents of Islamophobia. The main body of the interview guide was organized into sections, where one topic was examined at a time. The key questions were:

- a. How would you describe your experience or observation of an incident of discrimination in the last 1-2 years where your or someone's Islamic belief appeared to be the key motivation of the perpetrator?
- b. In your view, how has it influenced you or someone who experienced it at that time and afterwards? The probes would include questions on thoughts, behaviours, and feelings (e.g. frustration, guilt, anxiety, low mood or being unsafe).

When closing the interview, participants were given further opportunities to reflect on the topic and make recommendations for improving policies and programs they are familiar with. In qualitative interviews, the researcher's rapport building is essential for the quality of data and credibility of findings. As qualitative interviews can be intense, with the discussion of sensitive topics, researchers should build a relationship with participants (Dempsey et al., 2016). Rapport building should be used to promote a safe environment for participants to share personal details. Scholars introduce the concept of both the participant and researcher sharing personal stories to

create a level playing field and reduce power dynamics (Dempsey et al., 2016). However, it is important to note that researchers should have clear boundaries with participants without becoming too involved (Dempsey et al., 2016). Typically, researchers that conduct semi-structured interviews exhibit rapport building through the presence of a natural conversation (Irvine, Drew and Sainsbury, 2013). Specifically, in-person interviews often include instances of small talk, politeness, joking and non-verbal cues (Irvine et al., 2013). Due to the extenuating circumstances of COVID-19, interviews were conducted via video call rather than in-person. Only audio files were recorded and transcribed.

Preparation occurred for the interviews, where I received feedback from my supervisor about my approach and the interview guide. An essential aspect of interviews is the conversational atmosphere. Thus, I adjusted my engagement style and language to that of the participant's style to reduce the researcher-participant hierarchy. I was an active listener, helped participants when they needed it, gave clarifications, and provided prompts. To practise rapport building, researchers must listen effectively while forming a trusting relationship with participants (Dempsey et al., 2016). Additionally, interviews were conducted on days and times preferred by the participants to highlight the importance of their comfort for participation in the study. As critical social theorists aim to promote the voices of those who are silenced by society, rapport building is extremely important to evoke a comfortable atmosphere for participants who wish to share their stories.

Data Analysis and Strategies for Rigour

I completed a thematic analysis of the primary data using Magnusson and Marecek's (2018) framework to analyze the interviews, specifically focusing on the reflections and experiences of

individuals. My approach to analysis also drew from other scholars to add rigour to maintain transparency during the research process (Bryman, Teevan, and Bell, 2009). The analysis was inductive in nature, where coding schemes were developed from close reading, re-reading and analysis of the collected data, in contrast to the deductive approach where pre-existing coding schemes are applied to the dataset. The analysis and data collection processes were iterative. For each interview, field notes were taken. The interviews were transcribed immediately after data collection. It was important to review each transcript to gain insights, add/revise probes in the subsequent interview, and identify emerging topics for coding. After all data collection, the transcripts were read together, general notes were created, and the coding process began.

In the interpretive thematic analysis approach by Magnusson and Marecek (2018), the steps included (1) formulation of a set of topics to amplify the overarching research question; (2) selection of portions of the interviews (i.e., excerpts) that aligns with each of the topics; (3) annotation of excerpts; (4) reading and re-reading of all annotated excerpts to identify repeated ideas; (5) bringing excerpts with similar ideas together and writing an integrative summary for the idea unifying the excerpts and giving it a label i.e. theme or sub-theme. The coding included both statements and indirect observations and can be sorted using electronic software. In this case, NVivo was used to organize the coding data.

When considering strategies to establish rigour, researchers should be self-conscious when creating their research design, during data collection, and when conducting data analysis (Mays and Pope, 1995). In comparison to quantitative research, which is primarily focused on being precise, qualitative research prioritizes rich rigour and abundant explanations (Tracy, 2010). In this case, it is important to consider if there is enough data, whether the context is appropriate to the study's objectives, or if appropriate procedures were used to collect and

analyze the data. Rigorous research must occur during both the data collection and data analysis process (Tracy, 2010). These processes must also be transparent in terms of what steps were taken to obtain, organize, and analyze data. Being transparent and self-reflexive fall under the classification of being a sincere researcher. To maintain transparency in research, individuals should provide clear documentation regarding the research process while disclosing all challenges or victories when conducting research (Tracy, 2010).

Aspects of rigour also include credibility and transferability (Morse, 2015). In terms of credibility, researchers can gain this by completing descriptions and illustrations that are in-depth and culturally situated (Tracy, 2010). Researchers should provide details to their readers and should refrain from forming implicit assumptions. Transferability occurs when the readers relate to the research, which overlaps with their own life experiences and applies to their personal situations (Tracy, 2010). It is highly recommended for researchers to be observant of their interview guide and questions asked. In this case, the interview guide was edited multiple times, and pre-tests occurred. Thus, the goal of trustworthiness is important when conducting qualitative interviews as it produces rich data (Morse, 2015).

Regarding this research, I wish to advocate for Muslim individuals due to my connection with Islam. As I identify as Muslim, I strongly sympathize with the population of interest and understand the complexity of Islamophobia. Although I practise Islam and am a person of colour, I am not a visible Muslim and do not wear religious garments like the hijab. This affects how I am portrayed in society as I am not a target for Islamophobia and have distinct life experiences from other women who wear the hijab.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Belmont Report of 1979 is a milestone document that highlights ethical considerations when conducting research with human participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1979). Basic ethical principles include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. When respecting persons, they should be given autonomy, and others should be offered protection. In this case, participants were enrolled in the research purely on a voluntary basis, thus safeguarding their autonomy. Beneficence regarding qualitative research is important and is based on the notion not to harm participants, maximize benefits, and minimize harm (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1979).

This MRP prioritized the concept of beneficence and protected participants, as interviews were low risk. Rapport building was completed to ensure participants were comfortable and received support in cases of sensitive conversations. The last ethical principle is justice, in which individuals should be treated equally, and research should be advantageous for participants and society at large (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1979). Through this MRP, a goal will be to share the research results at conferences, reports, and academic papers to raise awareness on Islamophobia and further improve policymaking in Canada. The principles of the Belmont Report were applied through concepts of data collection, informed consent, and maintaining confidentiality.

FINDINGS

Semi-structured interviews with five Muslim women of various ethnicities were conducted. Participants self-identified themselves as either South Asian (Pakistani and Indian

descent), Lebanese, or Somali. Three out of five women were undergraduate students and two were graduate students at York University. Four out of five participants were visibly identifiable Muslims, through their religious dress code of wearing the hijab. Characteristics of the study sample are displayed in Table 1.

	Age	Ethnicity	Post-Secondary	Visibility as Muslim
Participant 1	25	South Asian	Masters Student	Wears the Hijab
Participant 2	20	South Asian	Undergraduate	Wears the Hijab
Participant 3	20	Lebanese-Canadian	Undergraduate	Wears the Hijab
Participant 4	29	Black-Somali	Masters Student	Wears the Hijab
Participant 5	21	South Asian	Undergraduate	Does not wear the Hijab. Wears Modest Clothes

These themes emerged from the data: a) Muslim Identity; b) World Events affecting Muslims; c) Depictions of Muslims; d) Day to Day Islamophobic Instances; e) Mental Health Outcomes; and f) Coping Mechanisms. The Muslim identity was an overarching theme among participants which portrayed both positive and negative aspects of being a Muslim in today's society.

These challenges are associated with world events and the social media portrayal of the Muslim religion. Events in North America such as 9/11, and more recently, the terrorism attack in London, Ontario were determined to have played indirect roles in the lives of participants. Due to these world events, particularly 9/11, Muslims portrayal in society has been impacted through propaganda in the media and television, as explained by participants.

In contrast to these depictions, participants discussed the progressive nature of Muslim representation in society. They were optimistic about Muslim representation as it promotes inclusivity. Not surprisingly, since this research was focused on Islamophobic acts and how it affected the mental health outcomes of Muslim women attending York University, a theme about day-to-day instances of Islamophobia also emerged. Included are overt forms of discrimination through physical assault, verbal abuse, cyberbullying, as well as covert experiences of Islamophobia, described as microaggressions, generalizations, and stereotyping.

The mental health outcomes of participants is also an important theme which indicates how Islamophobic instances affected the lives of participants. Lastly, the theme of coping mechanisms that participants used to heal after enduring Islamophobia emerged. These themes are depicted in the Figure 1 below, which indicates how they intertwine and are related to one another. Although this figure displays the entanglement between themes, all themes impact the Muslim identity. Therefore, the Muslim identity remains central to the depiction of Muslims, world events, Islamophobia, mental health outcomes, and coping strategies. Table 2 also demonstrates the subthemes found within each theme.

Figure 1. Visual Map of Themes

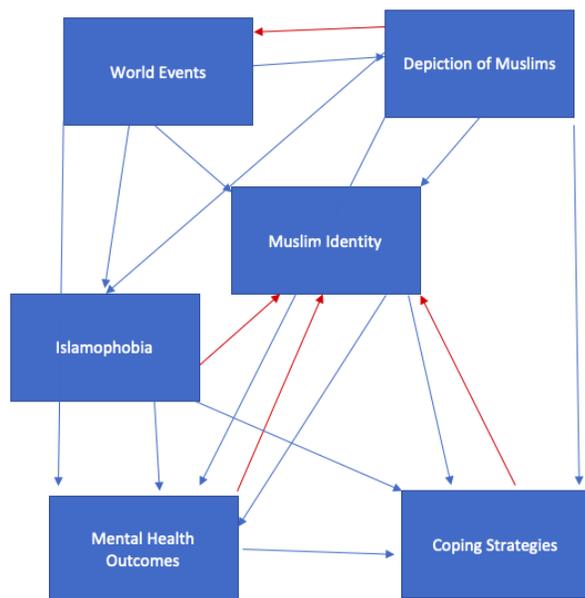


Table 2. Subthemes Within Each Themes	
Theme	Corresponding Subthemes
Muslim Identity in Canada	Positive Muslim Identity, Challenges when Showcasing Muslim Identity
Depiction of Muslims	Media's Portrayal of Muslim, Muslim Representation in Society
World Events	Post 9/11, London, ON Terrorism Attack
Day to Day Instances of Islamophobia	Overt Islamophobia, Covert Islamophobia

Impacts of Islamophobia on Mental Health	Depression/Anxiety, Numbness, Disappointment in Society Shock
Coping Mechanisms	Changing Daily Routines, Overcompensating, Family/Friends Support, Empowerment

Muslim Identity in Canada

Positive Muslim Identity

Practising Islam in Canada can be difficult for individuals who follow religious rules that are not considered a societal norm. This includes wearing religious garments that cover the individual's hair and body to practise modesty, praying five times a day, fasting, and refraining from intoxicating substances. Although these practises can be difficult, this spiritual lifestyle has many benefits for Muslims. Despite challenges they may experience, Islam is often seen as both a protective and grounding factor for Muslims. One participant said:

So getting literally five minutes to step away and to step into a conversation with God and to have this open, non judgmental, this beautiful peaceful space for me to just kind of, um, like let go and to be like, you know, like, even if, even if I'm not feeling even if I'm not seeking protection or even if I'm just wanting to express gratitude, just taking that time to do that within the day with, you know, the five times a day.

Here, the participant showcased the peaceful nature of Islam and the benefits of praying five times a day. This was also observed in another participant who described the grounding nature of Islam:

I think as a Muslim, I think that that's the driving of like, when I go through things, it's just that I have that trust in. I think for me, my, I think everyone, the religion means such different things for them, but for me, it's, it grounds me. It gives me something to center on something to rely on when things become so hard.

This participant, who previously lived in a Muslim country also used a different perspective to discuss the positives of practising Islam in Canada, where Muslims are a minority:

And I found that here, and this is something that's also equipped by one of my close friends and family that here, because it's not something that is available to us readily available to us. It's not the majority that we have to strive harder to hold onto our religion. And I found that that really made, um, us yearn for it more...whether it's connecting to classes, as we get older, finding different ways to continuously practice it within our circles. And so I look at that as very much a positive, which I think a lot of people would have thought the opposite. But for me it hasn't been because I grew up in Canada that I held onto it.

Therefore, by living in Canada, this participant developed a deeper connection with Islam, despite facing adversities while practising it. As Islam is not the mainstream religion practised in Canada, she made a special effort to maintain a level of religiosity.

Challenges when Showcasing Muslim Identity

Fear of Judgement When Practising Islam

As all participants identified as Muslims, a primary challenge for them was outwardly practising their religion without the fear of judgement by non-Muslims. This affected their ability to offer their daily prayers in public, wear modest and covered clothing in warm months, and their participation in virtual activities with their cameras on. One participant discussed the challenge of performing prayer at work:

So they like, in order to accommodate us, they said that you can go into the upstairs office and pray. And I just, but I just feel like it's always kind of been like, if I'm with like coworkers who are like, not who do not pray or something. I feel kind of like judged in a sense, like, why is she leaving to go pray or like...like, is she making up an excuse to just like, get off work? Or like, just to go sit down or something. And like, I feel like if I were like, it's always been kind of a fear of me... It's like, I always try to just like quickly go and like quickly, like call it a day.

Similarly, another participant discussed feeling self-conscious when taking time out of her day to pray, especially in front of her friends:

But if I was to pray, I know that like, I would probably feel kind of self-conscious or awkward if I was like with a group of people. And I had to be like, oh, I need to go like, pray really quickly. I might think that if they were Muslim friends, some of them might judge me as being too religious or with non-Muslim friends, same thing they might think I'm too religious.

Five daily prayers are made obligatory on Muslims that are offered before sunrise, throughout the day, after sunset, and during the night. Here, participants have described their fears of being judged by others. They have the belief that their colleagues and friends would not be supportive of their religion. The notion of being too religious was introduced by a participant as a negative portrayal of her identity, thus being judged by both non-Muslims and Muslims. Similarly, being an identifiable Muslim, another participant expressed her reluctance in turning the camera on when using virtual platforms:

And like sometimes I, I teachers, like if I just have to talk to them, I prefer not to have my camera on. And cause I know that like, I was thinking like, what if they're biased? Like if I'm just talking to you behind the screen, how would, you know, if I wore a hijab or how would you know, my religion? How would you know my race, any of that? So it's this idea of like, I feel it's like, you feel safer when you're not expressing yourself, which is really messed up.

When completing school virtually, this interviewee decided to turn the camera off in an effort to protect herself against possible underlying biases of peers and teachers. By doing so, it

is a protective factor in which she prevents herself from being judged. This fear is rooted within her predisposed notion that others will judge her for being a practising Muslim.

Responsibility of Representing Muslims

An aspect of wearing the hijab is the pressure and responsibility that comes with upholding religious values. This was an underlying theme among the participants when asked about their religiosity. A participant described the pressure she put upon herself to represent Islam and change the narrative:

You know, outside of the Muslim community, what that means, you are a walking, talking representation of what it means to be a Muslim... And it holds, I hold myself, that responsibility in that accountability that people are looking at me identifying me as a Muslim. And so every, every move of mine, every sentence matters, because I'm so afraid that people have this preconceived notion of what it means to be Muslim. And I'm a representation of that. And I have this opportunity to undo that. So that's, I think one layer of the difficulty.

This is representative of the responsibility of visible Muslims that acknowledge the unfair portrayal of Muslims in society and believe that even their own microscopic actions can affect the way Muslims are represented. In addition to this, another participant described the societal expectations enforced upon her due to wearing the hijab:

But as soon as I started getting older, people expected me to be mature. So I would hear, oh, can you even say that, like you're wearing a hijab, can you even like, make these jokes or like laugh at these jokes and these wouldn't come from Muslims. So I feel like, I feel like I was forced to be professional....but if I were to.. like laugh at an inappropriate joke, people would be like, oh, so like you're allowed to do that. Or if I were to do something, they would kind of expect of other people or they would talk about another hijabi and be like... she doesn't make these jokes. She doesn't leave the house, whatever, whatever... So there's that pressure going both ways because they would meet one hijabi. And expect her whole life is about Islam and she isn't allowed to do this mostly like cultural things. And they would just put it on me or vice versa...So yeah, I felt like for a while I felt like I had to be like the model Muslim. And then I realized it was just causing me like a lot of stress because it was literally just pretending to be someone I was not. So then I kind of stopped.

It is clear among multiple participants that wearing the hijab is associated with various stereotypes and the perception of being the ideal Muslim. This leads to challenges among the participants who felt pressure through societal ideologies to conform to what it means to be the perfect Muslim woman.

Depiction of Muslims

Media's Portrayal of Muslims

When enquiring about how Muslims are portrayed in society, participants heavily criticized the media's role in contributing to the negative narratives around Muslims and Islam.

Specifically, participants discussed the stereotypes of Muslims that are evident in television shows and movies:

First of all, we're not portrayed who we are. I think that, let me start off here. The people that are portraying us are there that all representing us are not Muslims. And what I mean is the people that are. Putting us in shows, creating movies around us, using us as the plot twist, using things that are horrific and that were so impactful for us. And I'm talking about all those shows that relate to the army and that relate to these terrorist attacks and CIA. And I mean, there's how many shows I can't even list. There's like FBI this... and all those shows of that...always use Muslims as a storyline.

This participant discussed the stereotype of Muslims being associated with terrorism, which is heightened and portrayed in mainstream television. This negative portrayal can subliminally affect how Muslims are treated. Another interviewee took a gendered approach to discuss how Muslim men and women are represented differently in the media:

It's always the storyline of the white savior in the story or the other person coming in to save the Muslim girl. And then our poor men are always just portrayed. Terrorists low lives. and the one thing that's happening now, super, like we need to tell our stories.

Here, the participant discusses the narrative that Muslim women are oppressed and naïve, whereas the men are the harsh oppressors. This can affect the perception of Muslims in society where it unconsciously creates an image of what Muslims are. This lack of appropriate

representation also contributes to social exclusion, as Muslim participants feel as if they are not accurately represented in the media. Participants in this research study also discussed how news channels contribute to the negative representation of Muslims in society. In particular, a participant described how headlines are formed when comparing Muslim terrorists with Caucasian terrorists:

I think they have been portrayed very, very poorly and unfairly because often times I would say, especially if there is some sort of, um, like crime that's committed and if it's done by someone that like let's say has a Muslim name, um, The news media...And like, they always make it very, like, they make it a thing to say the person's name in the headlines and make it clear that it was a Muslim man or that it was like, uh, a Pakistani person or like an Arab. And then if you sort of compare it to how, the way that they treat, like let's say, um, white criminals or white people that commit crimes, I think that is very different. And then they. Or if it's Christian people, like they don't sort of do the same thing....And they don't make it a statement to say the race or the gender and the headlines or their full names.

Here, the participant emphasizes the hypocrisy of news channels, in which they often specify the religion of a terrorist if they are Muslim. The participant highlighted the discrepancy of the way crimes are reported due to religion or race. Another participant relayed similar emotions when describing how the news channels report crimes:

It makes me so mad and media, we see that Muslims are portrayed so negatively as terrorist when something happens. But when it's a white person who doesn't act of terrorism, they're either mentally ill or their, their picture is not a picture of like, It's not a mugshot. It's a nice picture of them. Like what most recently happened, uh, within the family *In London, ON*.. yeah was really disturbing. And then the way that media portrayed this man, they showed a picture of him as a runner. That's that's not, he killed like an innocent family because they were Muslim. Like just even saying those words is so hurtful and, and really, really shocking.

This participant felt frustrated and hurt when observing the way white terrorists or extremists were portrayed in the media. White terrorists are often humanized, whereas Muslim terrorists are always connected to their religion. This is famously observed in the media portrayal of Dylan Roof, a white terrorist who killed nine African Americans in a South Carolina church. Dylan Roof was humanized when his mental illnesses were to blame for his crimes. Specifically, the Wall Street Journal even called him a “loner” rather than what he truly is, a terrorist (Butler, 2015). This forms biases in the minds of citizens, as the news channels constantly associate Islam with terrorism when there is a Muslim terrorist, however, fail to do the same when a white terrorist commits a horrific act. The participant used this as an example, as recently, in London, Ontario, a white terrorist murdered a family because they were Muslim. After doing so, headlines broadcasted that portrayed him in a sympathetic manner, calling him an isolated or angry man. Particularly, The London Free Press reported about his relationship with his parents and even highlighted some positive remarks spoken about him by his friends (Juha et al., 2021).

Therefore, the hypocrisy of the media, specifically in regards to the London, ON attack affected the mental health of Muslims, as it felt hurtful and shocking.

Muslim Representation in Society

When asked about the portrayal of Muslims in society, two participants shared how Muslim representation has been improving in mainstream media. In particular, one participant discussed how brands like Nike are practising inclusivity and promoting diversity through the release of a sports hijab:

And over time, like it's definitely changed. Like, I feel like there's more modest fashion now, which is awesome. And I know, um, a bunch of companies are like adapting to hijabi women. Like. Nike has a sports hijab. And I remember when that came out, like all my God, all my friends were so happy. We were like..finally, like Nike speaking out for hijabi woman. And it was like, so relieving and now definitely, I feel like it's much, of course like hate has also become much stronger.

A comparable point was made by a different participant, who argued the need for collaboration with Muslims to create realistic and respectful content in media. Additionally, she specifically mentioned the name of a Muslim news anchor, allowing for further inclusivity:

When it comes to media, um, or shows, um, written by us for us, with us, by us. That's one, I think now we're seeing it a little bit where we're having more representation. We

have currently like a Muslim hijabi, um, as a news anchor, I think her name is, is it Ganella mes....Her last name is Musa. I think it's Ginella Massa.

Thus, in terms of the depiction of Muslims, participants were pleased with increased amount of diversity, but were also wary of the media's portrayal of Muslims through anti-Islam propaganda and the detrimental role it plays on the lives of Muslims.

World Events

9/11 Impacts

While most youth in this research study fail to remember 9/11, one participant, aged 29, discussed how it impacted her life and safety:

All you kept seeing was Muslim terrorists. And I remember thinking, what does that even mean? What are terrorists? Why are they talking about us and..? Like, why are Muslims connect with that? I used to walk by myself with my friends at school on the way back.... And literally the next day, my mom was like, Nope, that's not happening....of like everybody walking together..and I still never fully grasped.... my last name is [Participant's last name retracted] its a very popular name that they tend to put on the no fly list. And so automatically, and I have siblings as well that their first names are, the names are constantly flagged. And so. It was quickly very evident that, okay, now we are going to be targets and we need to be safe...People around me were changing names. People around me were taking off different jobs. People around me were going back because

depending on where you were, the level of Islamophobia, but also violence towards Muslims was very high.

Throughout the research literature, 9/11 has been attributed to heightened experiences of Islamophobia. 9/11 led to an increased amount of fear in the lives of Muslims. Additionally, the participant also highlighted the change in airport security and even, the need for Muslims to adhere to societal standards of the typical Canadian.

London, Ontario Terror Attack

In June 2021, a Muslim family in London, Ontario was brutally killed by a white nationalist terrorist's vehicle while going on a walk. This unfortunate event indirectly affected Muslims around the country. I conducted my first interview the day after the London attack and most of the participants were disturbed by this horrific attack. Three out of five of the participants discussed the effect of the London attack on their daily lives:

Literally I remember like, I remember, like when I was like little or like even my mom sometimes, like she would go out and like traditional clothing. And like now I literally, I, I tell her like, don't go out with wearing like traditional clothing and like my sister-in-law, she literally wears the abaya. Yeah. So it makes me and my family rethink, like when I go outside every single day of my life, like, is there a chance that something could happen to me?

This participant related to the family who was killed for their religion and their visible identities. She felt fear, and in turn, her and her family refrained from wearing traditional clothes in public. Another participant described the complexity of the aftermath of Islamophobic events, with the belief that this leads to solidarity for Muslims but also a rise in Islamophobia:

Um, we have to talk about, I think what happened recently, right in London, Ontario. Now that experience it's going to do two things. I think people are realizing now is that one there's that solidarity and, um, empathy from the.... communities standing up, but on the other side, what's also happening is there's rise in anti-Muslim hate as well because it's fueling people. So now what is it doing to us is now we're on alert again....So we're on alert about wherever you're going, go in pairs, be safe. Don't be late. Don't walk on in certain neighborhoods. Um, because now we've already heard of experiences of, um, Muslim, uh, people being attacked or being targeted for stuff. Um, and so people are very looking at that. Very shocked as an oh, but why, why is that happening if right now, you know, we're, we're showing our compassion and our distaste to this and it's like, no, this always happens after a big incident is yes, you have that support that comes up, but it also fuels the other Islamophobes to come out of the woodwork.

This theme was evident among three interviews because world events such as terror attacks in other countries and cities can have an indirect effect on Muslims, inciting fear and discomfort.

Day to Day Islamophobia

In this paper, overt Islamophobia is described as outwardly acts of discrimination such as physical assault, verbal abuse, and Islamophobia occurring in the setting of an airport. The subtheme of covert Islamophobia includes microaggressions, social exclusion, perceived stereotypes and generalizations, as well as tensions raised by the political climate. I use Galtung's (1969) scholarly insights to relate forms of Islamophobia to physical violence, psychological violence, personal violence, and structural violence.

Overt Islamophobia

Physical Assault

While physical assault was not a common theme among the participants, one participant herself experienced a horrific attack due to her visibility as a Muslim. This participant was outside of a mall in Toronto, Ontario with friends and was wearing the hijab when she got assaulted by an older man due to her religion.

And I had an elderly man. I would say like middle age, actually middle-aged Caucasian men approach us and straight up just punch me in the face. And so this person approaches me, punches me in the face I'm seriously winded and just walks off. So like, I'm like hijabi sticking out like a sore thumb. Nobody else in the vicinity was hurt. Nobody else. You know, like nobody else was affected by this person, except for me.... And we escalated it to the to the like managers at that store. It's like a fairly big department store..unfortunately nothing happened. They told us that.. this person is like this person, you know, there were previous complaints about this person, but nothing really could be

done. There's no proof.. and that it would just take a very long time to go through and to kind of like address the situation...So the better thing is the better thing to do just to drop it like that.

This participant was victim to physical assault, an act of overt discrimination, because she was Muslim and was not supported by individuals who were in a position of power at a department store. This dangerous act of Islamophobia occurred to the participant and can be described as both physical and personal violence against her, as it was a targeted attack.

Verbal Abuse

The majority of participants experienced Islamophobia as a form of verbal abuse. Many participants were targeted due to their hijab and were called various slurs. One participant explained:

I was just waiting. Outside of like school to get picked up or I don't know. I was just standing there. And I remember some of these, like older guys were like in a circle and I've heard them shouting things like Terminator or Turbanator something. And I didn't even, I honestly didn't even understand what that meant until I went home.

Here, the participant was called a *Turbanator* because of her hijab. This contributes to the stereotype that both Muslims and Sikhs experience, as they are judged for their religious garments. Often times, perpetrators are ignorant to multiple religions and mistake Sikhs for

Muslims, leading to misdirected discrimination that was intended for Muslims. Another form of verbal abuse as a form of a stereotype and ignorance against the hijab includes:

I've heard people like throw around these jokes, like, oh, like, why are you wearing a towel on your head? Like, there's like certain things that people say and like, it's just it, even if it's not directly towards you and you hear them see it, that's also disturbing.

These forms of verbal abuse can be harmful to individuals who experience it. Similarly, the association between terrorism and Islam was discussed by a participant when she experienced verbal abuse.

There was an incident where I was facilitating a workshop... And the thing about our topics is that depending on the groups we're going to, we always want to make sure we have a safe space, safe learning space. So we do something called like, um, beginning sort of like guidelines and whatnot, just to sort of set the tone. And this person, I guess... maybe things were going on. I'm not too sure. And yeah, for us as facilitators, you want to ensure that your participants are feeling safe and you're controlling that. And anybody that disrupts that, right. Just letting them know, Hey, we don't like we don't condone this. We want to keep the same space... I guess I don't know what was going on, but then they. In response to me in response to that said, well, I don't know who you are for all I know you probably have a bomb under that scarf of yours.

This participant was discriminated against at her workplace and experienced a vocal form of stereotyping and Islamophobia. Another participant was not victim to verbal abuse due to Islamophobia, but due to her ethnicity as Arab:

Honestly, I, the first time I feel was when I was in grade, I want to say like six or seven one. And, but at the time it was more so like, I didn't know, that was even a slur kind of thing. So I was called like "sand N word". Yeah. So I took it as that's like you're using the wrong slur against me, like. The N word doesn't apply to me like I'm era. And I kinda just like, brushed it off, like, oh my God. So dumb. Like, you don't even know how to get like your slurs. Right. But then I actually found out that that's something that people call each other. Yeah. Like it's actually like a slur against Arabs.

This highlights the complexity of intersecting identities such as ethnicity, race, and religion leading to verbal abuse using slurs.

Airport Experiences

While it was not an overarching subtheme, one participant experienced Islamophobia at the airport. I will classify this form of overt Islamophobia as structural violence as airport policies and legalities have contributed to Islamophobia in Muslims. An example of Islamophobia occurring in airports includes targeting Muslims through "No Fly Lists". One participant was affected by a strip search due to her visibility as a Muslim, despite not being flagged by the metal detector:

Knowing that it was me and sort of me making that connection, but also being at an airport where I was selected for a strip search to the point where I had to not only remove my hijab, but they made me undo my braids and put their hands through it...for, I think this, I don't know what they thought I had under my hijab, but it definitely, so the assumption that they feel that, that what I think is so sacred to me they find it to be very, threatened.

The social rights of this participant were violated because of the strip search and is a form of overt Islamophobia as she was selected for a search due to her religious garments, the hijab.

Covert Islamophobia

As previously described, covert Islamophobia is considered discrimination against Muslims that occurs more subtly. Examples of this include microaggressions, generalizations and associating Islam with terrorism. In this case, the Palestine-Israel conflict also led to tensions between Muslim and Jewish communities in Canada, creating instances of covert Islamophobia.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are indirect forms of discrimination. In this case, all five participants experienced microaggressions. Many of these occurrences were related to the hijab:

So, the microaggressions of like, “oh, are you hot in that? Do you have hair under there? Do you take a shower with that? Towel head” “you're probably bald on there, there”.. and you're just right.....we look at the verbal, not verbal, but the...the body language and

gestures from people. So that's people giving you that side eye... or saying comments under their breath or walking to the opposite side from you..... to me. People talking to me on the phone and based on my voice, making an assumption of what I look... like. And then I approach.... And then when I meet them in person, you could tell they're like.... "oh, that's not what I imagined."

This participant experienced a range of microaggressions, particularly due to the hijab, when people implied that she did not have hair or called her a "towel head". She also experienced unfriendly attitudes from individuals due to her visibility. Being a citizen of Canada, people have judged her due to her voice, being ignorant to the fact that people of colour can indeed have a Canadian accent. Another participant also experienced ignorance regarding her hijab:

Or like, I remember like a lot of guys who, like we're friends in my elementary school, they were like, can I touch your hair like through, through your hijab? Like, it was weird. Like I would, or like people ask me, can I see your hair? Can I see a strand of your hair? Or like, wow, like what color is your hair? Like? Or like, I remember you had short hair. How long is your hair now? Like, stuff like that.

These questions can affect the lives of participants as they feel uncomfortable when being asked personal questions about their hair which is covered. Additionally, another interviewee described being affected by microaggressions in the workplace:

I've really gotten used to kind of like the stares and the questioning looks, especially after something happens, something unfortunate happens in the news...And someone with a Muslim name is related...When I...when I've gone to the mall..people will move away from me. Like when I step on a bus I've had... in my previous workplace, I've had a manager comment about how my dietary accommodations are so difficult, like in the middle of a meeting.

Microaggressions like these can have harmful impacts on the lives of Muslims and can be considered psychological violence as they are subtle forms of discrimination that are not outwardly discriminatory and can affect the mental health of participants.

Islam and Terrorism

Especially after 9/11, Islam has been associated with terrorism. This was evident in the research findings, due to the many generalizations made to participants about Islam and terrorism. One individual experienced this at York University during her virtual class:

Somehow the professor like got hacked or something and some students, or I don't know if it was a student or if it was like..from someone else, like an external person, but they had somehow hacked like the zoom call and they were playing like audio and they were also writing words down. And so one of the things that. My professor is Black and I think the person started off by calling him the N word and stuff and all over the screen that N word was written down. And I know that's not as Islamophobia but that was really disturbing to begin with. And then after.. it shifts into Islamophobia, where he started a

playing....something like in our, like in our religion is like it's called the Adhan and it's like a call to prayer. And so he started playing that and then he started playing guns and gunshot. So it was like, you could hear like someone reciting this, like, not like they were saying "AllahuAkbar" and then you could hear in the back, like a bunch of like gunshot fire sounds and screens and stuff. So like that association that Muslims are terrorists is basically what that, um, individual was trying to express.

This was a covert form of Islamophobia as it occurred in class and was not targeted at a specific individual. It subtly connected Islam to violence and terrorism through gunshots followed by the call to prayer. This is also a form of structural violence, as society has been programmed to connect Islam with terrorism. This participant, along with other students felt disturbed by this instance of Islamophobia. In this research, individuals could also express instances of observed Islamophobia that their family or friends experienced themselves. One participant shared her sister's story:

There was one with a high school teacher who we both had and.., I. So when I had her, I had like no feelings at all that she would maybe be Islamophobic or have any, Islamophobic like beliefs. But when my sister was her student, I remember she was telling me that... her teacher was talking about that she gave like a lesson on 9/11, and then she suddenly just started asking, like in the class who was Muslim. And then.. my, there was only two Muslim kids, my sister and one other kid. And... then she was asking them..do you have the Quran memorized? And then my sister was like, no, I don't. The other guy was like, no, I don't. And she was like, oh, okay. Well, like if possible, could

you please like recite something, you know, from the Quran for the class? Yeah. And then my sister was like, no, sorry. Like, I don't feel comfortable doing that... and then I remember my sister saying that it made her feel really uncomfortable that like she was giving a lesson on 9/11 and then all of a sudden she just started like asking questions about Islam and asking this like Muslim students to recite the Quran.

Here, a teacher, being in a position of power, inappropriately incorporated Islam into a lecture on 9/11. This association was disturbing for Muslim students in class and was an ignorant act. While the teacher singled out two Muslim students as a form of personal violence, this can also be considered structural violence. This teacher abused the power dynamics of the classroom to intimidate Muslim students and connect Islam to terrorism. The relation of Islam to terrorism has been amplified by societal structures like the media, television, legislation regarding anti-terrorism laws, and structural institutions like airports.

Social Exclusion

I consider social exclusion a form of covert Islamophobia as failing to include Muslims in society through examples like being cut off in class when attempting to speak and the loss of job opportunities. This was evident when one participant who was a visible Muslim was constantly cut off in class:

The lecture and I was, of course, like I'm at the front because I love responding to questions and I love participating, but I feel as though whenever I had a comment on a film that was not based around a religion or like people of color, like if it was just a

regular old movie, sometimes I would get cut off by other students while I'm talking. And then not have to be like, sorry, I was actually mid-sentence, you know, like I'd have to bring the attention back to what I was saying. Yeah. And as much as I want to be like, oh, it's just because people are ignorant. Like I know it's because there's this stereotype of Muslim women, like being quiet and being like gentle and just let, like, letting people walk all over them because if my friends would do it, they wouldn't really be interrupted. I have a...white male friend. Who's also in all of my classes as well, and no one's ever spoken up over him. Wow. So whenever that happened, I would just remember like, yup. It's directly because of how you look.

She was excluded in class where other students failed to appreciate her comments and statements. By cutting her off, it was clear that her opinion was not valued by others.

Another participant experienced a loss of a job opportunity due to her religion and visibility as a Muslim:

It was sad that like, there was someone who was more qualified than me. And I mean, I didn't expect to get the job to begin with because of how my interview did go. But I feel like that's sort of, um, like a religious based discrimination. Like maybe if I was not wearing my hijab, things could've gone differently. Or like, if he didn't know that I was Muslim, would he have acted towards me differently? Like he, does he have some sort of underlying biases that, that work. That clearly affected our interview. And I know that the person who got hired, I didn't understand why they, they were more qualified than me

because I, it seemed that they had to say, like, I found them on LinkedIn and I seem to have the same qualifications as me, but except they were white

Although she had the same qualifications as another individual, she believes that she was not hired due to her hijab. This is social exclusion as Muslims are unable to contribute to society due to lack of opportunities and unequal treatment. As it places Muslims at a disadvantage, social exclusion through the workplace is a form of structural violence, as institutions have deeply rooted Islamophobic tendencies and fail to support the Muslim population.

Covert Islamophobia Through the Palestine-Israel Conflict

York University is a diverse campus with both Muslim and Jewish representation. However, this leads to tensions between both groups due to the colonization of Palestinian land. While some scream “Anti-Semitism”, Islamophobia also occurs due to these international politics. One participant in particular was affected by cyberbullying on social media after advocating for Palestinian rights:

Yeah. Well like, um, like any slurs I would get, or right now, um, I've had to block the word.. “Israel”. Yeah. Because like, I don't really. I don't directly post well, I do sometimes, but when I directly post about those things going on, I turn off the comments. So it's like, I lose some support, but I also lose like hate.. So if I don't block those words, they'll just go to a random picture and just like comment, nasty things. So if I just restrict it, then it's like, it's not really a big deal...Like I am very vocal about it on my Instagram...and if I even leave a comment in support of someone's statement, like if they

make a, a public post about it, and I even just comment the free Palestine flag, like even if it's one of my friends, I'll get something in my DMS. That's like “the middle east needs to be bombed” or like just, just whatever.

This participant had to restrict certain words on Instagram as she was affected by bullying and hateful slurs. I classify this as covert Islamophobia because although it is regarding the Palestine-Israel conflict, religion was involved and was evident when individuals wished bombing upon a Muslim region like the Middle East. Another participant highlighted the tensions between her and a Jewish group member due to her visible Muslim identity and the Palestine-Israel conflict:

And I, cause there's a lot like you know, like there's that Israel conflict that happens recently. And um, I just feel like. Somehow I've had like some... I've had like a group that was made for me... And there was actually like a Jewish guy in there and Jewish guy... Jewish people also. Um, I forget what it's called... but...they are, so it can be visibly identified as Jewish and that's completely fine with me. But like, I just felt like he was always so kind of like cold to me compared to the rest of the group.. and I just felt like there was tension between us, even though I was completely fine with him and he's a human I'm human we're, we're working on a group project. There's nothing more than that, but I always felt this kind of idea of like, like what if he's like, like the way he thinks or, or this certain things like that kind of built this like...invisible barrier between us.

This concept of an invisible barrier as described by the participant is interesting as it implies that international events and policies affect relationships with individuals in Canada. As this participant wore a hijab, she perceived tension between her and a Jewish individual. This represents the parallel between Palestine-Israel relations, and how it has affected the Muslim and Jewish community in Canada. I will classify the effect of the Palestine-Israel conflict on Muslims as having structural roots due to the Canadian government's pro-Israel stance that fails to protect the Palestinian people, thus contributing to their downfall.

Impacts of Islamophobia on Mental Health

A main inquiry focus of this MRP was to determine how Islamophobic instances affected the mental health of participants. After the analysis, subthemes emerged of depression/anxiety, feeling numb after Islamophobia, feeling disappointed in society and sentiments of shock.

Depression/Anxiety

After sharing their experiences of Islamophobia, participants were questioned about their mental health. Two participants shared how Islamophobia and a lack of support led to depression or anxiety.

In those years I had become...I went through moments of depression. I went through moments of really heightened anxiety. And I noticed that it really, really had an impact on just my overall wellbeing. And so, and I finally got connected with people that I could relate to in that could support me. I then started to talk about it.

This participant discussed her moments of depression and anxiety when she lacked a supportive circle of friends to share her experiences with. This emphasizes the importance of a support system to cope with Islamophobia and instances of discrimination. Additionally, another participant explained her feelings of anxiety after hearing about an Islamophobic experience that her sister underwent with a teacher:

So I think just knowing that there are teachers at the school teaching Muslim student, And like, you don't really know how they're going to like discriminate against those students. Maybe they could be like giving them lower marks because they're Muslim or something like you don't know. Right. So I think it sort of like made me just feel anxious.

In this case, the participant felt anxious knowing that she was attending a school with Islamophobic teachers and worried that she would face a disadvantage in her grades due to underlying biases.

Numbness

Three out of five participants experienced emotions of what I describe as being numb to Islamophobic incidents or failing to be shocked by discrimination. One participant explained how Islamophobia has become so normalized:

Personally for me, like, because this is something I've lived with, like my whole life, this fear, or like the sort of thing I'm kind of like used to it as a sense. So like, it doesn't phase me as much as I might phase might've phase.

This notion of numbness to Islamophobia and feeling undaunted was echoed in another participant:

At some point it just like, before it used to kind of make me feel bad to think that some, like, people even think this about me, but now I feel like I've gotten in such an abundance that it just doesn't phase me.

She stated that she has been victim to multiple incidents of discrimination that it does not bother her. Thirdly, after being probed regarding the London, ON attack, another individual failed to feel shocked:

And so I think when London, Ontario happened, it wasn't like a shock of, oh, I can't believe this happened. It was here we go again. Here they are, again, like this is, this is something that we all are always aware of, that anytime we go outside, that anybody can decide to do X, Y, and Z.

Therefore, multiple incidents of Islamophobia that affect participants both directly and indirectly fail to evoke emotions out of them due to the abundance of discrimination they have experienced. Thus, I coin these sentiments as feeling numb to Islamophobia.

Disappointment in Society

Although not common among multiple participants, one individual expressed her disappointment in society:

I think most of all that makes me feel like. This like our society has failed us, essentially, because we're so advanced and we're so modern, but yet we still have not been able to break down these stereotypes and we still have all of these, like, um, like there's barriers in place.

This participant described the failure of society to protect minorities despite being so advanced in other aspects. This emphasizes the responsibility of society to ensure that there is equality among all members of the population, particularly BIPOC.

State of Shock

Four participants described their initial reaction to Islamophobic acts. This included feeling shocked.

And also to a shock, like, like I said, like it's, you know, you never feel like it's, you never really.. you never really think it's going to happen until it hits close to home or until you experienced it yourself. And, um, unfortunately in terms of how I have felt afterwards, it really has shaped how I go about the outside world.

This participant described how she felt shocked after experiencing Islamophobia, and its long-term effects on her life. This was also observed in another participant who experienced Islamophobia before going on a trip, and the shock that she felt which prevented her from processing her emotions:

I'm going to be honest. I think when it happened, I was on my way. I'm on a trip with a friend and so it definitely took the excitement away, but I think I shared it with her, but I think I was still in shock that it didn't fully settle in.

Thus, a common theme that affected participants' wellbeing was a state of shock after Islamophobia.

Coping Mechanisms

The last theme that emerged was how participants coped with the aftermath of their Islamophobic incidents. Participants have used both unhealthy and healthy coping mechanisms. This includes changing their daily routines to ensure that they are protected, overcompensating to make others feel comfortable, receiving support from family/friends, and personal empowerment.

Changing Daily Routines

This subtheme was prominent in the experiences of two participants. After undergoing Islamophobia, a coping mechanism was to change their routines as a preventative method. One participant explained how Islamophobia changed her future airport experiences:

Whenever I'm travelling....preparation, I'm always preparing earlier. I make sure I go way earlier than I need to be. But I also noticed the way I dress, some people only had to the airport, if they're going on a long trip, they'll wear comfortable clothes, right. Like

cozy clothes. But depending on where I'm going, I noticed that, and this is something that I did subconsciously, but now I know why I do it... I take time. I like, I'm very aware of what I'm dressing....So that when I approached the desk, um, the at least can make some connection. I don't know what like that, whether I decided to dress professionally or whatnot... I do take the time for that because there is, I know, like I have such a high chance of getting stopped. So I'm always taking my time with how I dress just to lower the chances of that happening. And so I'm definitely hyper-aware I'm I go very prepared, make sure I have my stuff organized. And what I mean is if I have a laptop with me, making sure that I have that ready to put on the scan, or I have my ticket ready... yeah, but my airport experience is definitely different now.

A coping mechanism for this participant was being overly prepared in airports and dressing professional to avoid being judged by others. Thus, she had to change her routine at an airport to prevent future Islamophobic events. Another participant changed her virtual activities after experiencing Islamophobia in a Zoom class:

Like I know sometimes when you start zoom, you kind of have a comfort level where you're, you're at home, you're like behind your own screen, so you don't really think anything's going to happen, but does that make you wary of joining like other zoom classes and like afraid that someone else is going to pop in and say something...Someone's going to pop in and say something because I do feel like this is a very like uncommon instance, but I think in terms of like other classes and stuff, like, I sort of prefer not to put my camera on.

This participant feels fear of another Islamophobic virtual instance occurring, therefore she copes with it by turning her camera off in class. By doing so, she is not a target for Islamophobia and believes she is more protected behind her screen.

Overcompensating

After experiencing Islamophobia, one participant admitted to overcompensating when around Non-Muslims by being outwardly respectful:

I just overcompensate and trying to make other people feel comfortable around me because I don't want them to feel uncomfortable. Because I wear hijab...So.. you know, whether that's like giving people space around me, ensuring that everybody else has a spot and I'm far like removed away...you know, from other people so that I don't make someone else feel uncomfortable.

She gives others space around her and puts in effort to make others feel comfortable just because of her visibility as a Muslim. This participant's experiences of Islamophobia pushed her to be overly kind to strangers in order to prioritize their comfort over her own.

Family/Friends Support

Three participants expressed how their family/friends were a source of support for them after Islamophobic instances.

If they like agreed and they understood kind of like why that was so wrong, that made me feel like better as you could... like, sort of like therapeutic.

Here, talking to friends about Islamophobia was therapeutic for the participant. Another participant gathered advice and validation from her friend after experiencing microaggressions and being cut off in class:

Yeah. So, when I remember in my first year, when I would get interrupted if it did kind of make it feel like, oh, I said something wrong and someone's trying to correct me. I'd kind of feel like I said something wrong and like, I should be embarrassed. Like, like I said, something like fully incorrect and I would tell my friends like, oh my God, like, am I wrong? And like I told you, my, my. I'm one of the quickest friends I made in York was, uh, the, what she's Filipino. And I would just like turn to her and I'd be like, oh my God, like, did I say something wrong? And she's like, no, he's just being an idiot. Like, I don't know why he cut you off. And it would kind of like validate my feelings. Yeah. If I were to feel like, oh, like why, why was I just cut off? Like, like what did I say that was wrong? Like, like whatever she would just tell me. Oh, no, like you're right. I don't know when he's cutting you off.

This sort of validation was a coping mechanism for the participant to ensure that she was not wrong, and she was in fact being targeted by her classmates because of her religion.

Empowerment

One participant in particular was very empowered after moments of social exclusion and Islamophobia. A lack of representation in her field of POC and instances of discrimination motivated her to create her own club for POC:

So actually this year, I got together with a bunch of people of color and we made an artist's association for people of color. So we kind of gave ourselves a little community to vent and just show support for each other...so that, that is a big outcome of what happened because. My friends and I realized like there's a lot that needs to be done. And maybe they'll take us seriously if we're in an association, but going into film...I kinda did center around having friends that are people of color.

This participant was empowered by her own personal experiences and took another leadership role to advocate for others after being discriminated against:

Honestly, it kinda like radicalized me. Yeah. Like I, I did run any election again this year. And my whole plan was to like, Be more of a voice and like take up more space and get it in their heads that like you can't just like, I can't just leave. And then the problem's gone, you know, I didn't end up getting the position, but my whole like platform was about like, you need this voice basically because it was centered around, like, it was very like, It was mostly like white people. And I would be the one task to run, like to mention, oh, we should do cultural events. We should do this.

This form of empowerment is a healthy coping mechanism that is an example of improving oneself and the wish to improve society after experiencing discrimination. Therefore, coping mechanisms can have a positive and negative affect on how you experience life after Islamophobia.

DISCUSSION

After completing the analysis of the data, I established six themes. These included the a) consequences and benefits of a Muslim identity; b) world events; c) depictions of Muslims; d) day to day instances of Islamophobia; e) mental health outcomes of Islamophobia; and lastly, f) how participants coped with the aftermath of their discriminatory event.

Muslim Identity

Considering the theme of Muslim identity, participants shared the positives of practising Islam in society and the backlash they faced due to their religion. Overall, participants were spiritually moved and thankful for their monotheistic relationship with Allah (God). They described their religion as peaceful and grounding. Scholars have determined the protective factor of religion on the health of individuals. Specifically, Dozier and colleagues (2008) concluded that having a secure relationship with God is associated with improved health outcomes. Additionally, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) also discovered that having a positive attachment with God can reduce depression, anxiety, physical illness and enhanced life satisfaction. It is established through previous literature that there are positive factors when practising religiosity. When considering the grounding factor of Islam, a participant in this study

shared how she relies on Islam after experiencing rough times in her personal life. This was comparable to research conducted by Nagra in 2011 when two Canadian Muslim women believed that their Muslim identity intensified and improved after 9/11. Their faith became stronger after Islamophobic experiences, and they felt secure in their relationship with Allah (Nagra, 2011). Although the participant in this study was not explicitly discussing Islamophobia, she similarly relied on her faith after generally experiencing life's challenges.

When considering the hardships of maintaining a Muslim identity, participants in this study primarily discussed their predisposed fear of being judged by non-Muslims when practising Islam and the societal pressure put upon them to represent Islam. Participants felt self-conscious when praying in public at their workplaces and in the presence of their friends. These emotions were echoed in the literature. Ali (2016) determined the perception of Muslims who prayed in public at the University of Illinois. After gathering interviews from Muslims, two participants, a Muslim woman and a Muslim man, felt self-conscious and awkward when praying in public. This was because they failed to conform to societal standards when outwardly practising Islam and felt judgement from others (Ali, 2016). In contrast, research focusing on religious-based discrimination in the workplace determined how Islamophobia affected American Muslim physicians. Padela and coauthors (2016) uncovered that although 47% of respondents believed that they faced scrutiny at work due to their Islamic faith, 66% of participants felt their religious affiliation positively influenced their work relationships. This was seen at higher odds in participants who prayed more than once a day and read the Quran often (Padela et al., 2016). Only 9% of participants believed their religious identity negatively affected relationships at work (Padela et al., 2016). Participants also struggled to find time for prayer. Therefore, there are differences in opinion regarding the level of religiosity and Muslim identity.

In this research study, with significantly fewer participants, one participant qualitatively shared her difficulty praying in the workplace due to personal feelings of being judged by others, thus negatively affecting her work relationships.

Another consequence of Muslim identity was the societal pressure evoked on Muslim women who wear the hijab to represent Islam. Through their visible identities, a participant in this study believed that she was a representation of Islam and could change the negative discourse about Muslims in society. Additionally, another participant shared how individuals were stereotypical against her, thus enforcing specific modest actions and mannerisms. She felt personal pressure to act as a “model Muslim.” These results were parallel to research conducted by Zine (2006) on Muslim girls attending Islamic private schools in Toronto, ON. Youth in Zine’s research study also shared the scrutiny they felt as they were identifiably Muslims and felt a burden of representing Islam (Zine, 2006). These Muslim students felt pressure to behave modestly and respectfully as their actions could represent the entire Muslim population and the perception of others about Muslims (Zine, 2006). Thus, considering existing literature and my research on Muslim youth, individuals, particularly Muslim women and girls, face societal pressures to represent Islam.

Depiction of Muslims

The portrayal of Muslims in society was an interesting theme in this MRP and was consistent with existing literature. An abundance of research has been conducted on how media propaganda has contributed to anti-Muslim stances. In this case, I identified subthemes as the media’s portrayal of Muslims and Muslim representation in society. Interviewees had analogous opinions on the depiction of Muslims in media due to inaccurate representations of Muslims, the

media's role in associating Islam with terrorism, portraying Muslims as oppressive, and how "Muslim" terrorists are described in the news.

Elkasssem et al. (2018) conducted interviews with Muslim youth and found similar results. Similar to the participants in this study, Elkasssem and colleagues found that students were not pleased with the media's portrayal of Muslims (Elkasssem et al., 2018). They also discussed the double standards within the media when they report that a Muslim committed a crime compared to others. Participants believed that when a Muslim is responsible for a crime, all Muslims are held to that same standard and are generalized as terrorists (Elkasssem et al., 2018). Additionally, a participant in this MRP outlined the depiction of Muslims in crime-based television shows and movies as terrorists.

Jack Shaheen's (2003) research on the portrayal of Muslims and Arabs in Hollywood is consistent with the notion that Muslims are associated with terrorists and being barbaric. Mainly, Shaheen discussed the generalization that all Arabs are Muslims, although being Arab is only their ethnicity (Shaheen, 2003). While many Arabs are indeed Muslims, Hollywood represents Arabs as villains, bombers, and terrorists. According to his research, Western protagonists have called Arab characters a wide variety of slurs, like "rats," "slum buckets," "pigs," "jackals," and more in Hollywood movies (Shaheen, 2003). The media also portrays Muslim women as oppressed victims (Bullock and Jafri, 2000).

Thus, existing literature can confirm participants' opinions in this research study when considering the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media. Two participants also voiced their opinion on Muslim representation in society, whether it be a Muslim news anchor or Nike sport hijabs. They believed that brands like Nike and news outlets have improved in increasing inclusivity and diversity. Research conducted by Moore examined how news outlets covered

Nike's new sports hijab. In this case, most news outlets portrayed Muslim women athletes as strong and liberated (Moore, 2018). The Washington Post was supportive of Nike's new merchandise, claiming that it was empowering and could yield significant influence in the world of sports, where many do not allow women to wear the hijab when participating (Moore, 2018). While some participants' opinion is that society is becoming more inclusive and accepting of Islam, they also acknowledge the media's role in the negative portrayal of Muslims.

World Events

Various world events have indirectly and directly affected Muslims. Terrorists who claim to be Muslim have committed horrific acts under the pretense of practising Islam. However, the religion of Islam is one of peace and love. As mentioned in this MRP, participants discussed how world events contributed to Islamophobia or have been responsible for generating fear in the lives of Muslims. In this case, two world events were discussed: 9/11 and the terrorist attack in London, Ontario.

While 9/11 occurred in the United States and resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives, it has contributed to a substantial amount of Islamophobia. Specifically, one participant discussed how 9/11 affected her sense of personal safety and how she and her family's names were on a no-fly list. Scholars like Perry and Poynting have contributed to academia on post 9/11 Islamophobia. They concluded that after 9/11, the media and state have contributed to and allowed Islamophobia. Perry and Poynting (2006) emphasized that anti-terrorism legislation, increased surveillance and intimidation methods used by law enforcement have enabled anti-Muslim hate after 9/11.

Additionally, after conducting qualitative interviews, Nagra and Maurutto (2020) identified a theme within their research regarding no-fly lists. Canadian participants in their study shared their belief that Muslims were only placed on the no-fly lists due to the systemic portrayal of the Muslim identity (Nagra and Maurutto, 2020). They believed that the Muslim identity was associated with being dangerous and threatening. Interviewees identified themselves or those close to them as being placed on the no-fly list and the impact it had on their mental and social wellbeing and financial security (Nagra and Maurutto, 2020).

Therefore, my research aligns with existing literature on the impact of 9/11 on individuals, particularly those unfairly placed on no-fly lists due to their religious faith. Additionally, participants in my research study also discussed the indirect effects of the London Terror attack on their lives. This major event occurred before interviews commenced, and participants felt unsafe wearing traditional clothes, were constantly on alert for other Islamophobic incidents, and felt unsafe in their communities. These were common emotions evoked after observing other Muslims being targeted due to their religion. Nadine Yousif of the Toronto Star interviewed Muslims in Ontario after the London attack and found similar results. Individuals felt unsafe and were discouraged from walking outside, especially in traditional clothing (Yousif, 2021). Interviewees were traumatized and in shock, while also fearing that they could be victims of Islamophobic attacks like in London, ON (Yousif, 2021). I can conclude that world events that either lead to increased Islamophobia or are themselves an act of Islamophobia can affect the lives of Muslims. They can induce feelings of fear, a heightened amount of discrimination and can be traumatizing.

Day to Day Islamophobia

I identified multiple examples of overt and covert Islamophobia. Participants experienced overt Islamophobia through physical assault, verbal abuse, and being targeted at the airport. Participants in this study were targeted by non-Muslims due to their religious garments, like the hijab. They were victims of verbal abuse when called slurs and accused of terrorism. In particular, a participant was called a “turbanator.” This highlights the misdirected Islamophobia that often impacts people who practise Sikhism. As they also wear religious garments and are visibly identifiable as Sikhs, they face discrimination and are confused for Muslims. Sikhs are described as “crypto-Muslims” as they are examples of Muslim-looking people (Sian, 2017). They, too, are racially profiled, seen as suspicious, and experienced discrimination due to the aftermath of 9/11. As seen in this research study, a Muslim participant was under scrutiny when visiting airports. Similarly, the Sikh Coalition conveyed that in some airports, 100% of Sikh travellers had to complete secondary screening (Sian, 2017). This statistic indicates that structural institutions like airports target Muslims but also other POC who may be mistaken for Muslim or are visibly unique, like Sikhs.

Covert Islamophobia occurred through microaggressions, associating Islam with terrorism, social exclusion, and tensions around the Palestine-Israel conflict. Instances of Islamophobia have been studied in the literature. Authors like Sheridan determined how the prevalence of Islamophobia was affected by 9/11 and found that 76% of participants reported an increase after 9/11 (Sheridan, 2006). Similarly, Nadal and colleagues (2012) conducted interviews to study overt forms of Islamophobia and microaggressions. Similar themes were present in their research (Nadal et al., 2012). Islamophobic experiences consisted of associating Islam with terrorism, being targeted by airport security, and microaggressions regarding the hijab

(Nadal et al., 2012). Therefore, many Muslims in today's society experience ignorance and discrimination. The social exclusion of Muslim students was an interesting subtheme of covert Islamophobia. Specifically, this occurred through the experiences of a participant who was disrespected in classroom settings when she was prevented from participating.

Another experience of social exclusion occurred through the loss of a job opportunity due to perceived Islamophobia. Research indicates that job insecurity due to Islamophobia is a prominent issue that Muslims, particularly women, experience. A Canadian study in 2002 aimed to determine the effect of the hijab on workplace opportunities, particularly in the service and manufacturing sector (Persad and Lukas, 2002). It was reported that after interviews, 40.6% of participants were told they needed to remove their hijab to secure the position. Participants also felt uncomfortable when completing the job interview, felt as if interviewers were dismissive, and 78% of participants felt they did not get the job due to their hijab (Persad and Lukas, 2002). Their experiences were strikingly similar to that of the participant enrolled in my research study, as she believed her job interviewer was unfriendly, cold, and intimidated by her hijab. Thus, wearing the hijab was seen as a negative quality by employers.

Additionally, Koura (2018) also studied how Muslim women who wore the hijab navigated workplace challenges. Her employer told one participant that customers would question her Muslim American identity and her patriotism to the USA (Koura, 2018). Thus, she was asked to wear an American flag pin on her hijab to counteract her Muslim identity (Koura, 2018).

After examining the discrimination that participants underwent, I argue that Islamophobia is a form of structural violence against Muslims. The concept of structural violence is attributed to Galtung (1969) as foundational structures that produce unequal power dynamics and unfair

life chances. According to Galtung, there are four dimensions of violence; physical, psychological, personal and structural. Farmer (2006) also describes structural violence as social arrangements that harm individuals through political and economic aspects.

Throughout my findings, I classified acts of Islamophobia as dimensions of structural violence. Structures within society have contributed to discrimination against Muslims. Specifically, institutions like the government, the education system, legislations, airports, and the media, have failed to protect Muslims and instead contribute to the negative portrayal of Muslims. After 9/11, the Canadian government and its anti-terrorism laws specifically targeted Muslims, thus classifying them as being dangerous to society. This was evident at airports when Muslims were placed on no-fly lists and were targeted due to their appearance and Muslim identities. Structural violence against Muslims also occurred through the media, which pushed narratives that Muslims were terrorists. This portrayal is still evident in today's society. Islamophobia that was rooted within these structural institutions has affected the success of Muslims. As observed through this MRP, participants shared countless experiences of Islamophobia that have impacted their mental health and place in society. Thus, I argue that Islamophobia as structural violence and through other dimensions of physical, psychological and personal violence has contributed to inequality in the Muslim population.

Mental Health of Muslims and Coping Mechanisms

The final two themes relate to the effect of Islamophobia on Muslim lives. The primary aim of this MRP was to determine the role it played on the mental/social wellbeing of Muslim students attending York University. While these students had various experiences, many Islamophobic instances evoked similar feelings and emotions in the participants.

Participants felt depressed, anxious, numb, disappointed in society, and shocked due to their Islamophobic experiences. This research contributes to the existing literature on the mental health of Muslims as it provides a gendered perspective of how youth are affected by Islamophobia in Canada. Many American researchers have conducted studies on this topic like Hodge and colleagues, who reported that 27.9% of participants experienced depression after Islamophobia (Hodge et al., 2015).

Interestingly, certain acts of discrimination were found to increase levels of depression. For example, being called offensive names or being targeted by law enforcement was associated with having clinically high levels of depressive symptoms (Hodge et al., 2015). Similarly, Hassan (2017) established that experiencing verbal abuse and physical assault was highly correlated to nervousness, worthlessness and depression. While my research did not take an intersectionality approach and consisted of interviews with five individuals from a variety of ethnicities, research conducted specifically on the Arab population, found that greater amounts of abuse based on either race, religion, or ethnicity accounted for higher levels of psychological distress (Ikizler and Szymanski, 2018).

Moreover, Abdulrahim et al. (2012) highlighted that Arab Americans who are more in touch with their American identity experienced more discrimination. However, Arab American Muslims who are further away from their white racial identity also are impacted by discrimination, which impacts their mental health (Abdulrahim et al., 2012). There was, however, a major gap in the literature regarding the mental wellbeing of post-secondary Muslim women, particularly in Canada. Lowe and coauthors (2019) studied the Muslim American college student population in one of the few studies on this topic. Results included that 42.9% of participants were classified as having either Major Depression Disorder or General Anxiety

Disorder (GAD), where perceived discrimination was associated with having more severe symptoms of these illnesses (Lowe et al., 2019). It was established that a strong Muslim American identity was associated with lower GAD symptoms for those who experienced discrimination at a low level (Lowe et al., 2019). While this research focused on the general mental health impacts of Islamophobia on Muslims and not clinically diagnosed mental illnesses, it was comparable in the sense that anxiety could be evoked in individuals after experiencing Islamophobia.

Feelings of numbness but also shock were also evident in participants of this research study. They felt numb after experiencing multiple instances of Islamophobia were indirectly affected by the London, ON attack. Henceforth, interviewees lost faith in society and were not surprised when they experienced discrimination. Although we live in a more improved and inclusive society, one participant was also disappointed in society's ability to protect Muslims. Here, the participant was acknowledging the structural roots in which Islamophobia thrives. This relates to the concept of Islamophobia as structural violence, in which power dynamics and societal configurations have contributed to discrimination against Muslims.

Participants also outlined how they coped with Islamophobia. This included changing their daily routines, overcompensating, support from family and friends, and personal empowerment. Participants have described their coping mechanisms differently, including moulding their personal lives to prevent further instances of Islamophobia, like being conscious of dressing oneself at airports and turning off the camera in virtual spaces. This was also observed in a study conducted by a Belgian study by De Nolf and colleagues (2021), in which participants, who were students, also avoided situations that could lead to further discrimination. It was reported that participants changed their physical appearance to oblige by societal standards (De Nolf et al.,

2021). While in this MRP, participants overcompensated to prevent further Islamophobia and maintained professionalism through their attire at the airport, the coping mechanisms are similar to that of participants in the study by De Nolf et al. Another coping mechanism found by De Nolf and colleagues was communicating with family and friends to manage the aftermath of Islamophobia (De Nolf et al., 2021).

I observed this subtheme when participants confided in family and friends for support after Islamophobia. Therefore, these coping mechanisms are also observed in the literature. On the other hand, one participant used social exclusion and Islamophobia that she faced as a tool to advocate for diversity and inclusivity on the York University campus. This was also observed in instances of modern-day society by activists and political representatives like Ilhan Omar. Omar is a US White House representative, and she experiences Islamophobia daily (Hirji, 2021). She is particularly an enemy of Donald Trump, and in the past, she has used her social media as a platform to respond to the backlash received from him. Omar and other Muslim women do not tolerate Islamophobia and sexism, even if it is from the former President of the United States. She uses her platform to empower others and advocate for racialized communities (Hirji, 2021). When faced with death threats by republican candidates, Ilhan Omar called out Islamophobia and discrimination. In the face of Islamophobia, she is vocal about her experiences and uses her social media platform to spread awareness (Hirji 2021). Thus, empowerment is a positive coping mechanism in reaction to facing discrimination.

This MRP has discussed Islamophobia and its impacts on the mental health outcomes of participants through a thematic analysis. Muslim students in this research study have described their challenges after experiencing Islamophobia but have also shown resilience, optimism, and strong faith when tackling hardships.

Strengths and Limitations

I conducted this research study to gather experiences and observations of Islamophobia in Muslim students. This population has been understudied, especially in Canada. Strengths of this study included using a gendered approach to shed light on the experiences of five Muslim women, four out five, who wore religious garments like the hijab. Gathering primary data was an asset in which I analyzed the results to determine themes. It contributed to the scholarly literature on this topic. It also provided a unique perspective of Muslim youth in today's society who constantly face challenges to question their Muslim identities, like Islamophobia and societal pressures.

Limitations of this research include the small sample size. It would be beneficial to gather the experiences of more Muslim women to allow for improvement in validity and enhance the thematic analysis. It would also be interesting to use an intersectionality perspective and determine how religion, race, gender, age and ethnicity intertwine to affect the mental health of Muslim students. In this case, participants self-reported how Islamophobia affected their mental health using a general approach, but further research could be conducted to establish a link between diagnosed mental health illnesses and the effects of discrimination.

Recommendations

In this research study, I asked participants to share their opinions on how to eliminate Islamophobia, highlighted in the table below. I will share my recommendations on constructing the multicultural and safe country that Canada claims to be in the following section.

Policies in Canada fail to consider the health of Muslim students. While Muslims are briefly mentioned in Canada's Anti-Racism strategy of 2019-2022, improvements need to be made to

eliminate Islamophobia in society. After the London, Ontario attack on the Afzal family, activists pushed for governmental action. The Liberal party in Ontario advanced a motion to condemn Islamophobia following the attack, which was rejected by the Ford government (CBC News, 2021). However, the Ford government reiterated that a motion was unanimously signed in 2017 to condemn Islamophobia. A disconnect between political parties has been evident regarding social issues. However, policies need to be created that protect Muslim youth from Islamophobia, collaborate with Muslim communities, and create frameworks to reduce Islamophobia in Canada.

Rather than the increased surveillance of Muslims, policies need to be enforced to monitor individuals with racist tendencies. The anti-terrorism legislature should be modified to prevent innocent Muslims from being targeted at airports due to their religious visibility. Furthermore, legislation like Bill 62 and Bill 21 in Quebec has stripped the rights of Muslim women. These need to be revoked and challenged by the Canadian population. These bills force Muslim women to choose between their religion and their career to prevent Muslims from being represented in specific fields. This legislation tolerates Islamophobia as it increases job insecurity in Muslims by allowing employers to discriminate against Muslim women and alienate them from society.

Furthermore, education policies need to be created to push for anti-Islamophobia workshops in schools and universities. As there is a power imbalance between teachers and students, policies need to be made to protect Muslim students from being discriminated against by authority figures at schools, as seen from one participant's experience. Policies should also enforce anti-racism and anti-Islamophobia curriculum in schools to introduce these concepts to

students earlier in life. Additionally, mental health policies in Canada should be inclusive of Muslim individuals, particularly younger Muslim girls.

Mental health services should also be easily accessible for Muslims, and all school counsellors should receive anti-racism training. Further Muslim representation would be beneficial in all aspects of life. By setting a goal to hire a specific number of Muslim teachers, professors, news anchors, policy-makers, actors, artists, health care workers, Canada can create a more inclusive society. It is essential to collaborate with Muslims when it comes to media and news channels as it provides them with a method to change the narrative around Islam. Additionally, having Muslim representation will benefit youth who rarely observe Muslims being portrayed positively and will promote diversity.

Recommendation	Findings
Acknowledgement/ Rejecting it	<p>“And the way I had to do that was create a public group for people to have to join. Like the representation was not there. Yeah. So just like how we love having, um, Like obviously there's a reason for black history month, but there's also like Islamic history month. No one talks about that know.”</p> <p>“We need to call out us as unfolding when we see it mean to reject it, there should be zero tolerance for it... We need to be condemning actively condemning Islamophobia in all its forms and have a zero tolerance for it and our spaces.”</p> <p>“Like, we're, everyone's like working on like, uh, acknowledging all these different religions. Like I know like one thing that recently started, um, I know like a lot of my classes, sometimes we, we start like.... like, we'd like to like acknowledge the Aboriginal land that we're on and stuff. Yeah. And I know that Muslims aren't on this land or anything, but if we're trying to like incorporate kind of this idea that, or we're trying to like break down Islamophobia, then there has to be some sort of acknowledgement. There has to be some sort of like education towards this for students, especially.”</p>
Mandatory Oppression	<p>“Oppression training.. mandatory for teachers and we've been pushing this cause I was also with YFS last year and we've been pushing this for so long. Cause a lot</p>

Training/ Workshops	<p>of teachers say a lot of professors say things that they don't know is incorrect and it's like, why would I have to suffer for that?"</p> <p>"I don't know, like, I guess just. I think, yeah, just like educating people or for instance, like, even in work places like having workshops on diversity and stuff like that. Are always a good idea."</p>
Parenting	<p>"And I think it really just, it stems from like birth, like, like when these, uh, When you're born, like how your parents raise you. And I think it's really important too, to start like backtracking, like where does this really stem from?"</p>
Showing Solidarity/ Support for Muslims	<p>"I think, I guess again, number one, showing support... in situations, for instance, like the London attacks, putting out a statement, saying that, you know, like we don't condone this behavior. And then also, if someone does experience some, Islamophobia or racism and it's on the school campus or it's within like a certain company to actually take action and make sure that the people that did it are held responsible instead of just letting it slide."</p>
Coalition Building	<p>"I think also what would be really important is, um, to have coalitions. So not only between, uh, not only focusing on Muslims, but focusing on other, um, BIPOC communities, especially those that are targeted, that are misrepresented...that are marginalized...and kind of having a united front..and having an opportunity to tell your story or to tell our stories so that people can see the spectrum of oppression that, that, that literally.. communities, including the Muslim community experience....and....through having a united front and through telling your stories and...you allow... opportunities to inform people."</p>
Collaboration and Engagement with Muslims	<p>"Engage in like a meaningful dialogue with the Muslim community. It means amplifying the voices of Muslims and spotlighting, um, you know, initiatives within the Muslim community...And you just want to give you a couple of examples...so there's like Muslimfest. It's an award-winning festival. That's in Mississauga, Ontario....and it celebrates Muslim arts and culture and entertain entertainment and crafts and Muslimfest was created...to hold a space to, for, they call it bridge building.....positively engage youth, young Canadians post 9/11. So most of us, it was literally created to challenge the narrative of about Muslims post 9/11. And it's one of the most successful...festivals in Ontario..... to have provided... a level of support to Canadian communities that is critical. And yet their stories are not.....they're not represented. And you know, they're not a part of this mainstream representation of Muslims. the works of Muslims is really important... We need to, again, amplify Muslim voices and Muslim representation</p> <p>"Taking actions that support like Muslim communities or, or supporting Muslims...Maybe the government can work with like mosques or even most of</p>

	the communities to help even like support them so that other people know that the government does support these Muslims.”
Monitoring Spaces	“Things like...best practices online, um, you know, need to be..need to be monitored. Especially in online spaces that make it difficult to some Islamophobic content and to kind of... also profit off the hatred...”
Reducing Misinformation	<p>“And then I think also recognizing that there's a cycle of misinformation that happens, and this is through like, this is multifaceted. This is through media. This is through academia. This is through politics. This is through think tanks like your university, not York University in particular, but I mean institutions. So for example, if there's misinformation about Muslim people, that's disseminated and it's put out into the world and it's picked up by social media by the media.”</p> <p>“Breaking the cycle of misinformation...and there's a couple of ways that we can do it. We need to study it.... so like if there is an overarching, if there's a dominant narrative about what it means to be Muslim, we need an opportunity to be able to replace that with a normative representation of what it really means to be Muslim. And...I think what's really important is again, like challenging the root of it”</p>
Educational Campaigns	“First and foremost, it would be the education on the root....There's also campaigns. Like “I'm Your Muslim Neighbor” and it's a campaign to educate your neighbor about Islam and Muslims. And it's an opportunity for them to ask you questions that, you know, they might be uncomfortable to ask, but you're holding that space for them to engage with you and to be like, okay, why do you wear hijab? And what does hijab mean to you? There are also grassroots organizations like the Muslim welfare center..... it's been serving...the Canadian community for like decades and it's, it's not based on just being Muslim it's regardless of your origin or your background.”
Policy	“And then we need policies that allow... allow people to challenge racist notions, and they're replaced not on, not only to, to challenge them, but to replace them.”

CONCLUSION

Muslim individuals, particularly Muslim women, are underrepresented in Canadian research literature. I conducted this MRP to determine the mental health outcomes of Islamophobia on Muslim students at York University in Toronto, Ontario. Five women were interviewed, all ranging from the ages of 19-29, and were from diverse ethnic backgrounds. I conducted qualitative, semi structured interviews to examine how Islamophobia affected their

lives. Through a thematic analysis, I identified six themes: a) the Muslim identity; b) world events; c) depiction of Muslims; d) day to day instances of Islamophobia; e), mental health impacts of Islamophobia; and f) coping mechanisms.

Participants highlighted both the positives and challenges of having a Muslim identity, how world events shaped further Islamophobia, and how Muslims were portrayed in society. Many participants found fault in the media's depiction of Muslims. These individuals also experienced a variety of Islamophobic events, such as overt forms of physical assault, verbal abuse, and a horrific airport experience, as well as covert forms of Islamophobia through subtle microaggressions, social exclusion, associating Islam with terrorism and the tensions surrounding the Palestine-Israel conflict. These instances of Islamophobia contributed to mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, numbness, shock, and disappointment in society. Coping mechanisms were also identified by participants as positive or negative reactions to their experiences of Islamophobia. My findings contributed to existing literature through discovering similar results to other studies. Despite negativity around their religion, participants remained optimistic and resilient, hoping for a better world for us all.

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Appendix



Study Information and Consent Form

Study: Islamophobia's Consequences on the Mental Wellbeing of Muslim Youth

Researchers:

Primary researcher: Zainab Khan, Graduate Student
Health Policy Equity, York University

zainabkhanMRP@hotmail.com

Supervisor: Dr. Dennis Raphael, York University

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to gather perspectives of young Canadian Muslims about Islamophobia and its impacts on mental/social wellbeing.

Who is eligible: You are eligible to participate in the study if you are currently a student at York University, 18-30 years of age, and have experienced or observed instances (among family members or close friends) of Islamophobia in Canada during last 1-2 years. All information provided by you will be kept highly confidential and your decision to participate is completely voluntary.

What You Will Be Asked to Do: As a participant you would be asked to join a one-to-one qualitative interview approximately 45-60 minute long via online meeting platform or phone. The researcher would gather your perspectives about your own experiences or observations of Islamophobia among family members or close friend, and how it may have impacted your or your family members/friends' social/mental wellbeing. The conversation would be audio recorded to capture details and subsequently transcribed without names. Any video files of the online meeting will not be downloaded. All participants will be offered an electronic gift card worth \$15 as a token of appreciation.

Risks and Discomforts: There are no foreseeable physical risks for the participants. However, the topic of Islamophobia may cause some discomfort.. In these situations, please tell the interviewer and you may pause the conversation. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you have the right to not answer any questions or withdraw from the study without any penalty. We do not anticipate that participation in the study will cause any extreme distress. However, if at any time you do experience mental health challenges that require attention, please contact one of the following:

1. Good 2 Talk: www.good2talk.ca / 1-866-925-5454
2. YorkU Student Counselling: <https://counselling.students.yorku.ca/> 416-736-5297.
3. Gerstein Crisis Centre: <http://gersteincentre.org> / 416-929-5200

Benefits of the Research: There is no direct tangible benefit for the participant though you may gain some critical awareness through the process of self-reflection. All participants will be

provided with a resource list with helpful contacts at York University and community-based organizations. Research findings will offer scholarly insights about the experiences of Islamophobia and its impact on health of Canadian Muslim youth. These findings are anticipated to inform development of inclusive programs and policy making. Also, the study would contribute towards the Major Research Project of the primary researcher to complete her degree requirement.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University, its staff or the researcher either now, or in the future. The primary researcher has never been a TA at York University during her graduate career, and completed her undergraduate degree from the University of Waterloo. Thus, there is no existing relationship between her and future participants.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be destroyed if it has not reached the analysis stage.

Confidentiality: The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed, in which names and other identifying qualifiers will be removed. All audio files will be destroyed immediately after transcription and accuracy check. Video files of online meeting will not be downloaded nor transcribed. Each participant will be assigned a Study ID. A separate paper-based “key” linking the participant name with Study ID will be kept during the data collection phase and then destroyed. All de-identified files with data will be stored on encrypted and/or password protected USBs and/or computer. The participant related data files will be destroyed by December 30, 2024. Only the primary researcher and her supervisor would have access to individual-level data.

Without any participant name or identifiable information, only aggregate research data would be shared with larger audiences as reports, academic papers or conference presentations. Direct quotations that are used to emphasize the results will never be connected to identifiable information of an individual participant. Unless you specifically indicate on your consent form, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Zainab Khan by e-mail zainabkhanMRP@hotmail.ca or my supervisor by email draphael@yorku.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the School of Health Policy and Management Research Ethics Committee, on behalf of York University, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Graduate Program Office at gradhlth@yorku.ca or at xxxxx Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Please sign the next page – Consent Form

Consent Form

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in the study called “Islamophobia’s Consequences on the Mental Wellbeing of Muslim Students” conducted by Ms. Zainab Khan (Master’s of Arts student). I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____
Participant

Date _____

Signature _____
Principal Investigator

Date _____

I, _____, agree to allow audio record of the interview with the understanding that I will not be identified by name and all audio data will be destroyed immediately after accuracy check.

Signature _____
Participant

Date _____

Appendix 2

Qualitative Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. If there is anything not clear during the conversation, please feel free to stop and ask me to explain.

First, I would like you to think about religiosity and practicing Islam in Canada.

1. How would you describe your level of religiosity and ability to practice it in Canada?
 - a. Probes: say prayers regularly, wear hijab, fast...
 - b. Do you normally wear religious garments? If so, what do you wear? Tell me about how you decided to wear it? What was your experience like when you first began wearing it?
2. What makes it easy/difficult for you?
 - a. Probes: factors within family, community, workplace, and campus

[Researcher summarizes the discussion and asks ‘Would you like to add or change something?’]

Let’s now talk about an experience or observation of religion-based discrimination.

3. Thinking about the past 1-2 years, I want you to tell me about times in your daily life when you felt discriminated or you observed someone else being discriminated against because of religion?
 - a. Probes: when did it happen? how did it happen?
 - b. Probe: how did you/other person feel/felt at that moment?
 - c. Probe: what did you/other person do about it? did you/other person share it with anyone or sought help/advice; why was it so, in your view?
 - d. Probe: do you think it has something to do with your gender? How about race? How about being born outside of Canada?
4. How has this incident changed your/other person’s day-to day routines and how?
 - a. Probe: ways to commute, times of a day to travel, dressing up, communicating, socializing, place of worship, feelings of safety, work place
5. How has this affected your/other person’s mental health in general or wellbeing and how?
 - a. Probes: worry, uncertainly, frustration, anxiety, anger, low mood
 - b. Probes: How are you coping with it? Could you give some examples?

[Researcher summarizes the discussion and asks ‘Would you like to add or change something?’]

Now, I would like to gather your overall perspectives about the Muslim community in Canada.

6. Can you tell me about how you think Muslims have been portrayed in society? How has this changed over time?
7. What do you think the government or university or work places can do to help Muslims and eliminate Islamophobia?

[Researcher summarizes the discussion and asks ‘Would you like to add or change something?’]

8. Thank you for your participation. Is there anything you’d like to add?

Demographic Questions

1. How do you identify your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
2. How would you describe your ethnicity or race?
3. Firstly, let’s talk about where your parents were born. If they were born in a place other than Canada, how old were they when they came to Canada?
4. Now tell me about where you were born?
5. It would be interesting to learn about how you and your parents came to Canada. Could you tell me about it? How long have you lived in Canada?
6. How long have you attended York University
7. What is your year of study?
8. Can you tell me what year you were born in?

*Appendix 3***MRP Study Flyer**

ARE YOU:

- 1) A 18-30-year-old York student?
- 2) Do you identify as Muslim?
- 3) Have you experienced or observed Islamophobia?

If yes, you may be eligible to participate in a semi-structured interview. This 60-minute, recorded interview on an online platform will analyze the impact of Islamophobia on the mental wellbeing of York students.

Participants will receive a \$15 gift card as an honorarium to thank them for their time.

For more information, contact: Zainab Khan at zainabkhanMRP@hotmail.com
Principal Investigator: Zainab Khan,
MA Candidate
Supervisor: Dr. Dennis Raphael

This research has been approved by the
York University
Ethics Board



The logo for York University, featuring the word "YORK" in a large, bold, black serif font, with "UNIVERSITY" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font below it. To the right of the text is a red square containing a white stylized letter "U".

Appendix 4

Support Resources List

1. Good 2 Talk: Confidential Support Service for Individuals in Post-Secondary Education
 - a. <https://good2talk.ca/>
2. Youth Link: Youth Counselling
 - a. <https://youthlink.ca/>
3. MindyourMind: Health and Wellness Resources
 - a. <https://mindyourmind.ca/>
4. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)
 - a. <https://www.camh.ca/>
5. Smokers Helpline
 - a. <https://www.smokershelpline.ca/>
6. Greater Toronto Area Intergroup: Alcoholics Anonymous
 - a. <https://www.aatoronto.org/>
7. Assaulted Women's Helpline
 - a. <https://www.awhl.org/>
8. Toronto's Rape Crisis Centre
 - a. <https://trccmwar.ca/>
9. City of Toronto: Shelter, Support and Housing
 - a. <http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=c0aeab2cedfb0410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>
10. Costi Immigration Services
 - a. <http://www.costi.org/>
11. Legal Aid
 - a. <http://www.legalaid.on.ca/>
12. Keep.meSAFE: Free Counselling
 - a. <https://myssp.app/keepmesafe/ca/home>
13. YorkU Student Accessibility Services
 - a. <https://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/>
14. YorkU Student Counselling, Health and Well-being
 - a. <https://counselling.students.yorku.ca/>
15. Khalil Center: Muslim Mental Health Services
 - a. <https://khalilcenter.com/mental-health-service-landing-page/>
16. Institute for Muslim Mental Health: Mental Health Support
 - a. <https://muslimmentalhealth.com/>
17. Nisa Helpline: Free Helpline for Muslim Women
 - a. <https://nisahelpline.com/>