

Understanding Islamophobia

2018

This is for anyone who wants to learn more about Islamophobia and how it operates. We draw upon the latest research about Islamophobia to address important questions about what it is, how it operates, what its impacts are and who it effects. We also consider how Islamophobia is enabled, how to challenge it and how to report it.

Islamophobia – what is it?

The first ever use of 'Islamophobia is often associated with L'Orient vu de l'Occident (The Orient seen from the West) by Etienne Dinet and Sliman Ben Ibrahim in 1925; however, the current use relates to the Runnymede Trust (1997:4) who defined Islamophobia as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam. It refers also to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs'

In the 20th anniversary report by the Runnymede Trust (2017: 1), Islamophobia is defined as anti-Muslim racism with a more detailed definition being:

'Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life'

Characteristics of Islamophobia

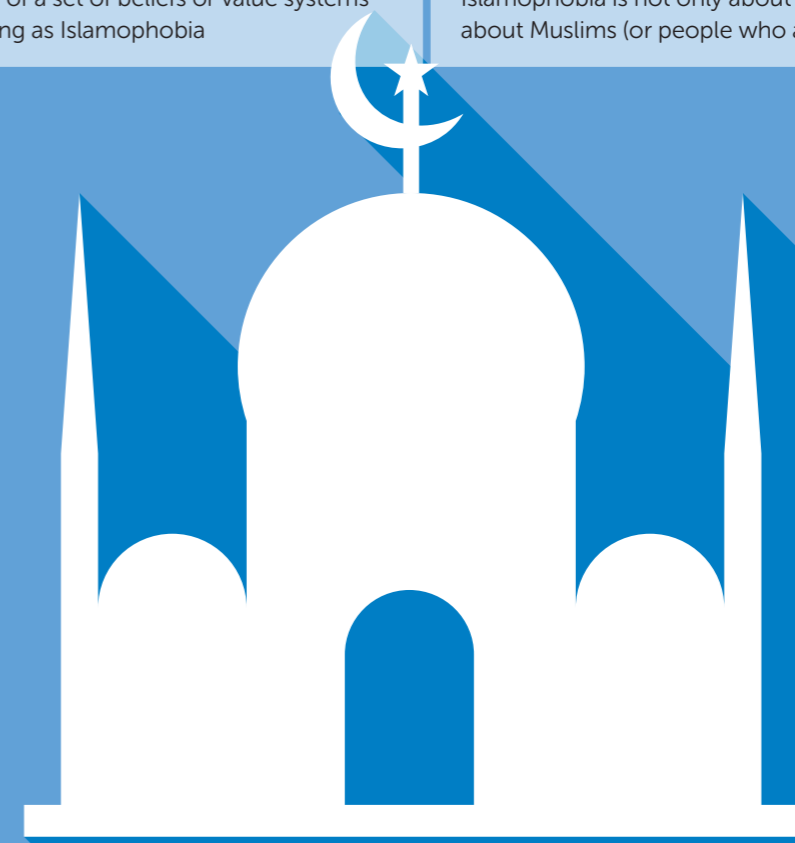
Islamophobia is characterised by beliefs, practices and behaviours that reinforce a 'closed view of Islam' (Runnymede Trust, 1997). These create a distorted view of Islam and of Muslims and provide a platform for the distribution of fear, hatred and discrimination.

Closed views of Islam:

- Islam as Monolithic and static
- Islam as Other and separate
- Islam as inferior
- Islam as an aggressive enemy
- Islam as manipulative
- Muslim criticism of the West are rejected
- Discrimination against Muslims is defended
- Anti-Muslim discourse seen as natural

There is some debate over the meaning of Islamophobia although most critics do not offer a more appropriate alternative (Green, 2015).

Criticisms of the term Islamophobia	The reality
Islamophobia prevents people from making legitimate criticisms of Muslims and Islam	People are free to make considered criticisms without being hateful or discriminatory
Islamophobia is about a phobia of the religion of Islam and not of Muslims	Halliday (1999) prefers 'anti-Muslimism' to describe discrimination against Muslims but Islamophobia is often used to include both.
There is no consensus on what Islamophobia is so clearly it is not a valid concept and therefore is not worthy of study	There are many terms, concepts and ideas that lack a clear definition or are contested and have fuzzy boundaries – this does not mean that they are invalid or do not exist.
You cannot be phobic of a set of beliefs or value systems so there is no such thing as Islamophobia	Islamophobia is not only about the Islamic religion; it is about Muslims (or people who are assumed to be Muslim)



If we only debate the relevance and meaning of the term, we overlook the real issue; Muslims, including those who look Muslim or are assumed to be following the Islamic faith, experience anti-Muslim hatred, anti-Muslim racism and discrimination. Islamophobia promotes stereotypical and distorted views of Islam and people of the Muslim faith that result in bias, discrimination and exclusion. This a serious issue that needs to be recognized and addressed.

Islamophobia – how does it operate?

Islamophobia operates through verbal and physical attacks, damage to property or buildings, the distribution of literature, through demonstrations and marches, hate speech, personal attacks or intimidation or through discomforting looks, stares and glances.



Online – on social media or other platforms, where people share Islamophobic material, images or viewpoints. Online Islamophobia can include words, images, videos, music, discussion forums and messages

“Yesterday I was watching a YouTube video and it was just a pretty harmless video of people trying Pakistani snacks. And obviously I just randomly went to the comments section just to see what people wrote about. And loads of people were just kind of against Muslims and saying how Muslims should be thrown out of America, thrown out of UK, all kinds of racist comments that you just kind of feel...You just kind of feel scared knowing that people like that are out there”



Offline – street-based Islamophobia tends to be about stereotyping and demonising Muslims or about calling for physical violence against them (Zempi and Awan, 2016)

Many offline incidents of Islamophobia involve abusive behaviour or physical attack (Tell MAMA, 2018)



Personally – through one-to-one interactions that are Islamophobic in nature. For example, this could be interactions that are Islamophobic in nature between two colleagues at work or between two passers-by on public transport or on the street.

“We just thought we’ll go out and something to eat, it’s just Saturday night [after Prayers], like midnight and we were in Jubbahs [white tunics], we walked into the centre, we heard like people singing Rule Britannia and this was literally a couple of weeks after that incident, the Woolwich, and the amount of abuse we got and the amount of stares we got”.



Nationally – through negative government or political policies, strategies, campaigns and initiatives that stigmatise Muslims and work to monitor and control Muslim citizens



Institutionally and structurally – through institutional decision-making processes that operate to exclude Muslim employees and customers in diverse ways, or to place Muslims under surveillance. This may include Islamophobia by the institutions of the state such as police forces, local authorities or government agencies. In addition, Islamophobia may work through structures that exclude Muslims such as those relating to educational progression, promotion at work or access to health, welfare or public life.

“You can be stopped by random police checks as well, when you are walking... They think you are out to cause trouble...when you are just walking home”



Resistance to mosque development – planning permission may be refused due to collective Islamophobia mobilised through petitions and lobbying, and internal Islamophobia within planning departments.

“There was a news article in the [local paper] cause we’ve got the new mosque... the headline was... ‘old pub has turned to a mosque’, and you read the comments and you read what people say. That’s the kind of things you get discouraged from, that’s the kind of racism you, kind of, read. Which, I mean, it’s people’s comments you read”



Locally - Islamophobia operates in everyday public spaces where people interact such as on the street, in shopping areas and on public transport. Most incidents are in public spaces or on transport networks (Tell MAMA, 2018)

“I feel there’s a distrust between our neighbours because our house has been robbed four times... I felt like that they must have known it was Eid for them to know that we were out the house...maybe our neighbours had been looking out the window and seen that we’d gone and they just, when we’d gone they just go in”

Islamophobia – who does it affect?

Women and men

Reports of Islamophobia indicate that Muslim women are the main victims. 61% of the incidents reported to Tell MAMA in 2015 were against women; this was 56% for 2016 and 57.5% in 2017 (Tell MAMA, 2016, 2017, 2018). Visible Muslim women tend to be the main victims.

“walking at night alone might not be a good idea, if you’re wearing the headscarf... Because I’m a Muslim, like they can see I’m a Muslim and they might have opinions and views about Islam and stuff and if they watch the News... it’s like you need to watch out for things you need to not be somebody who’s too loud, seek attention of unwanted people”.

Men who visibility display their Muslim identity through their dress or beard and men who belong to visible minority ethnic groups are also affected by Islamophobia.

Children and young people

Islamophobia at school and in public spaces affects children and young people as they are negotiating the transition to adulthood.

“I was on the bus with my friend, we were just sitting on the very back seats and there were three Scottish teenagers [i.e. White], two girls and one guy and they were all drunk... first they just started with the you know name-calling... I

kind of ignored it... but then the girl pulled my scarf off and she’s like, ‘why do you wear this’, you know ‘are you trying to hide your nits or something...’, then she pulled my hair.

Ethnic and religious minorities

Although Islamophobia directly affects Muslims, it can also affect other groups of people who are mistaken for being Muslim such as Sikhs, Hindus and other people of South Asian heritage. It can also affect Black African and Caribbean people.

‘I think people actually think that if you are brown, then you are Muslim...people think that the only person with a turban is a Muslim... they just look at you really strangely, like that person doesn’t want you to be there’

Those wearing clothes perceived as Islamic

Islamophobia can also affect white people who wear clothes that the perpetrator associates with Islam or people who are misrecognised as Muslims such as women who chose to cover their heads.

Migrants

Islamophobia affects asylum seekers and refugees of diverse faiths and none. It can also affect people who are recognised as ‘not-quite-white’ such as Central and Eastern European migrants.

(Hopkins et al, 2015, 2017)

Islamophobia – what are its impacts?

Islamophobia denies people a sense of respect and dignity

Islamophobia ignores the diversity of Muslim communities

Islamophobia promotes social isolation

Islamophobia promotes psychological harm

Islamophobia restricts and limits use of everyday spaces

Islamophobia harms international relations

Islamophobia silences people

Repeat incidents of Islamophobia increase feelings of vulnerability and anxiety for victims and their families

Islamophobia leads to the exclusion of young people

Islamophobia prevents people from reaching their full potential

Islamophobia – what enables it?



Terrorist incidents - Violence or terrorist incidents by those who are extremist and label themselves Muslims can help to promote Islamophobic attitudes and values.

“for example, when the 9/11 happened, there was a lot of racist attacks that happened then”



International politics – decisions made by powerful political leaders in the world that promote the idea that the Islamic World is a threat to ‘the West’ or is less worthy and less important than Europe, North America and Australia



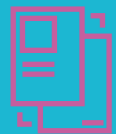
High profile events - media coverage of high profile events and incidents such as the Woolwich incident (the murder of Lee Rigby) and the Rotherham child abuse scandal can act as triggers for Islamophobic incidents (Zempi and Awan, 2016).



Visibility – visible signs of Islam can enable Islamophobia whereas the absence of such signs can lead to people ‘passing’ as not being Muslim. Multiple forms of visibility – such as skin colour and dress choice – also enable Islamophobia.



Institutions - ignorance about Muslims and Islam encourages misinformation, prejudice and discrimination and this can be facilitated through institutional practices and processes that discriminate against Muslims.



Print media – representations and accounts in the print media that reinforce problematic stereotypes about Muslims that lead to the promotion of closed views about Islam



Social media – the distribution of Islamophobic material can be enhanced by social media and the sharing of discriminatory ideas, images and text on Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms.

“So much of the media portray Muslims in a negative and anti-Muslim way. We are always linked with terrorism, it’s really discouraging”

“More widely, yeah, we talk about it all the time but all the time, we talk all the time about us on TV, we talk all the time about us on the radio, we confuse Islam and terrorism”

The five pillars of Islamophobia - what are they?

The first pillars of Islamophobia are the social actors (pillars) that produce the ideas and practices that result in disadvantage for Muslims (Massoumi et al. 2017: 4)

First and most important -

(1) The state - and the counter-terrorism strategies found in such institutions - police, intelligence services and now in schools and universities and so on - these counter-terrorism strategies disadvantage Muslims

The other four pillars of Islamophobia are social or political movements

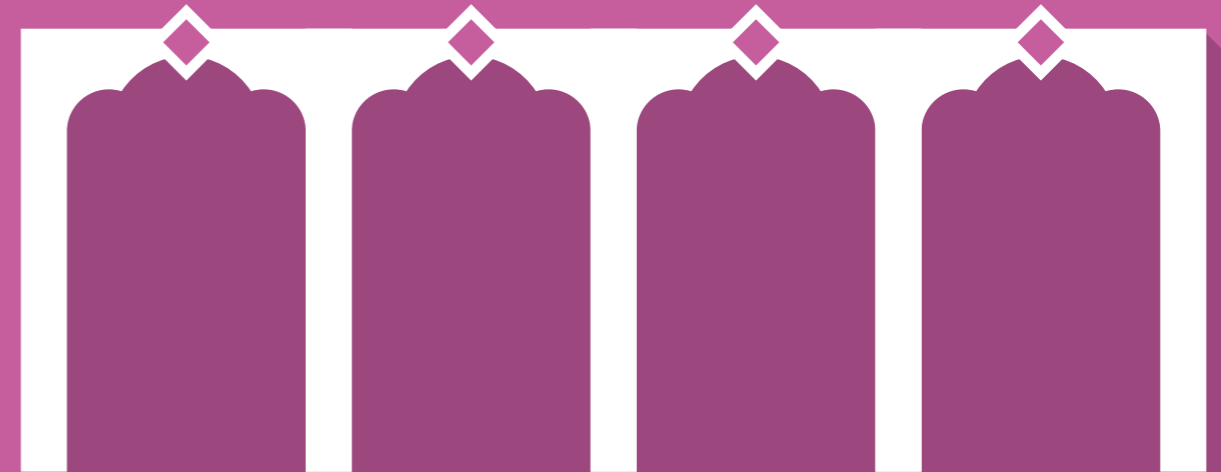
(2) The Far Right and the counterjihad movement e.g. Pegida, UKIP,

Connecting with the Far Right are three other movements that promote Islamophobia

(3) neo-conservative movement that operate particularly in the US and UK such as the Henry Jackson society

(4) Parts of the Zionist movement; and

(5) Pro-war movement/New Atheists/New secularists



“sometimes like when you go out people make fun of you ...this old woman she was walking and ...she was like ‘Muslims are stupid’ and she was shouting so much in like the middle of the town and everybody was all staring at her... They just stood there”

Islamophobia – how to challenge it?

Call it out!

Develop strategies of resistance

Challenge the media – send letters, raise issues, express concerns

Engage with politics

Be an upstander - make a stand against anything you think is Islamophobic

Improve public understandings of Islam and of Muslim communities

Connect with and develop approaches with other movements that challenge discrimination

Revise educational curricula and increase training about Islamophobia

Encourage and promote views of Islam that recognize its diversity

(Finlay et al 2015)

“One of the things that the present generation is trying to do is to get involved in media, to get involved in film, to get involved in politics, to get involved you know not just your usual science, technology, engineering and maths. To branch out, be more public. I think that is really important for Muslims and for how they are seen”

Islamophobia - how to report it?

Islamophobia targets people because of perceptions about their affiliation to the Islamic faith. This is often also about the victims' race with assumptions being made about their skin colour and other facial features.

Hate crime is motivated by discrimination or prejudice based on who you are or what you look like. Hate crime can be targeted at you because of your race, religion, disability (which includes mental health and learning disabilities), gender identity, sexual orientation and membership of an alternative subculture. You can also be targeted because someone you are associated with has these characteristics or because the perpetrator perceives you to have specific characteristics even if you do not have them.



Islamophobic hate crimes include criminal activity against people or property. Other examples of hate crime include verbal abuse, harassment, physical assault and threatening behaviour as well as abusive phone calls, text messages, cyberbullying and intimidation. Hate crime can also include the circulation or displaying of discriminatory literature, images, effigies, posters, graffiti and arson.

So what should I do? All cases should be reported to the Police

If you do not feel comfortable reporting to this Police, you can report to a third party reporting service.

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The information contained here comes from three research projects that explored issues of Islamophobia. All quotes are from research participants who were involved in one of these projects:

Young people's everyday geopolitics in Scotland - <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/youngpeople/> (Peter Hopkins, Katherine Botterill, Gurchathen Sanghera and Rowena Arshad) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

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