



Institute for Religious  
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Studies

**POLICY PAPER:**

**Lessons from Examining Canadian Muslim Youth  
Challenges and Pathways to Resilience**

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MAC focuses on building communities and strengthening neighbourhoods nation-wide, through services and collaborations with groups from different religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Over the past two decades MAC has grown to be the largest grass-roots Muslim organization with a national reach rooted in strong local chapters in 14 cities across Canada. With 15 community centers, 7 full-time schools, 20 weekend schools, 4 childcare centers, MAC serves around 40,000 community members weekly.

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## INTRODUCTION

Muslim youth in Canada face daily challenges which impact their sense of identity and belonging, their mental health and well-being, and their faith. While there are some excellent examinations of these issues and other factors in the existing literature on Muslim youth, the majority of the available literature examines Muslim youth in the United States and other non-Canadian places, which creates gaps that the study which informs this policy report aimed to fill. Similarly, while the literature on Muslim youth in Canada has provided an excellent foundation for examining some of the challenges they face, the full extent and interconnectedness of these challenges, and how Muslim youth understand these challenges for themselves remained to be built upon.

After 72 qualitative interviews in five cities, the results show that the primary challenge facing urban Muslim youth in Canada is identity crisis or the problem of seemingly irreconcilable dual identities, exacerbated by generational gaps in families and Muslim communities, and the contingent burdens of codeswitching and ambassadorship for Islam. Direct and structural Islamophobia fosters the crisis and adds additional stressors on Muslim youth, including mental health issues, financial or job insecurity, a lack of belonging and the experience of vicarious trauma from witnessing atrocities against Muslims globally, among other factors. In dealing with the ongoing identity crisis and its accompanying stressors, Muslim youth are not finding the space, solace, programming and guidance they feel they need from their religious communities. Intracommunity problems, including a lack of community inclusion, lateral violence such as racism and misogyny, and infrastructural problems such as a lack of

adequate/relevant mentorship and programming or meaningful spaces of participation for youth in Islamic centres and mosques, only serve to alienate Muslim youth in Canada further. A number of alarming outcomes from these compounded issues were reported by respondents.

This policy report will briefly outline the methodology and relevance of the study before expounding its findings regarding primary challenges of Muslim youth in Canada and identified pathways of resilience, in summary. The final section will offer practical recommendations for Islamic organizations and institutions hoping to take up the cause of Muslim youth.

#### **METHODOLOGY AND RELEVANCE**

Interviews for this study were conducted in focus groups of 3 to 12 participants (in-person) or through individual interviews in-person or over the phone. The primary methodological framework for this study is constructivist grounded theory, which allows theories to emerge from the data, rather than trying to prove pre-emptively offered hypotheses. This method is best facilitated by semi-structured, qualitative interviews with open-ended questions, an approach which was adopted therein.

Sampling for this study was conducted using purposive methods and included considerations for accessibility barriers, trust barriers and demographic diversity. One method of purposive sampling used in the study was the strategic marketing of recruitment materials to relevant populations through a number of diverse methods. To be eligible to participate in the study, prospective participants had to identify as Muslim and live in one of the five cities of the study (Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto/ GTA, Ottawa and Montreal). They had to be between the ages of 13 to 32 years old. As soon as someone showed interest in the study, they were

approached by email to answer any questions they might have and invite them to fill out three mandatory forms used to guarantee the anonymity of the participants.

Participants continued to be recruited and interviewed until it became clear that the study had reached “data saturation,” despite a seemingly uneven distribution of participants by municipality. Data saturation refers to a point when no new insights seem obtainable from expanding the sample further, while being cognizant of demographic diversity limitations and subsequent possible claims about the generalizability of this sample.

Space does not permit total dissemination of the demographic distributions of the study; however, the diversity of respondents across multiple compounded positionalities (gender, race/ethnicity, education, employment status, attendance at Islamic schools, participation in Islamic centers, involvement with Muslim organizations, etc) is significant and well-executed. That being said, there are some clear limitations for this study, including sect, class and population centre. Firstly, the lack of diversity of sects represented in this study makes it so that the findings herein can only be understood as representative of Sunni Muslim youth in Canada. Secondly, while attempts were made to recruit participants from a variety of economic classes, this study falls short of its target. As such, it remains primarily representative of low to middle class Muslim youth in Canada, with the lion’s share (69%) of participants identifying as middle class proper. Lastly, this study did not have any participants from rural areas in Canada. As such, these findings are relevant only to urban Muslim youth populations.

## **FINDINGS**

It became clear early on in interviews that the main primary challenge faced by Muslim youth in Canada is the “**problem of dual identities**,” sometimes referred to as “an **identity crisis**” or “**third culture problem**.” In either immediate responses to this initial question, or at some point throughout *all* individual interviews and focus groups, this challenge was consistently listed by participants as primary, and further, the challenge from which most other challenges stem. Sometimes this was realized retrospectively, after a number of contingent issues had been mentioned; other times it was reported right away, and the participants elaborated on contingent issues after the fact.

Muslim youth respondents for this study expressed that one root of the identity crises is the serious **tension between Muslim cultures or the required tenets of Islam and the surrounding non-Muslim cultural framework**. In several cases, the issue is perceived as an inherent tension and even incompatibility between Canadian and Islamic cultures. For many respondents, positive socio-political rhetoric about the acceptance of Muslims is heartening but ultimately does little to remove tensions they experience about practicing their faith. Moreover, as confirmed by study respondents and in the existing literature on Muslim youth, the pressure does not only come from non-Muslim students, but sometimes fellow Muslim students are the ones to pressure their peers into following the mainstream culture.

The issue of living dual identities was cited by participants as being most often **exacerbated by a familial generational gap**, particularly for second generation Muslims. For 65% of participants in this study, the baggage of cultural expectations at home and in their Deen weighed on them, particularly when they were confronted with “outside,” non-Muslim contexts

either in their peer groups, at school, volunteering, in sports, or just being in public. Further, a gendered aspect to the generational gap was also noted by some respondents.

Most participants described further challenges as being tied to the primary one of identity crisis. For example, a number of participants reported being forced to “code-switch” between the separate spheres of their lives. The phenomenon of **codeswitching** was reported by participants in this study as being a survival mechanism, but one which contributed to significant mental stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues. The awareness of the stressor of codeswitching was noted even by respondents who felt helpless to avoid it as a practice.

Additionally, a number of respondents also reported feeling the **consistent burden of explanation/representation or ambassadorship of Islam** when it came to dealing with non-Muslim communities, especially if there was no way to completely code-switch (i.e. they were readily identifiable as Muslim). Some respondents explained that the burden to explain comes from seeking acceptance from others and that, even when they viewed it in somewhat positive terms, as *dawah*, they still saw it as a by-product of general Islamophobia and a lack of understanding about Muslims/Islam.

Indeed, all study respondents reported experiences with **Islamophobia** either directly (in terms of incidences they experienced themselves or that someone they knew experienced) or structurally (in terms of socio-economic barriers they came up against). Many of the experiences recounted by Muslim youth during interviews relayed gut-wrenching violence and discrimination. Further, within the context of external pressures and especially Islamophobia, numerous Muslim youth expressed mental health and identity problems brought on by the



experiencing of **vicarious trauma**. In the purview of this study, respondents reported witnessing global violence against Muslims through media sources, along with the detrimental effects such witnessing had on them.

What is vital to observe here is that, in most cases, respondents viewed their experience of Islamophobia as related to *but only sometimes the cause of* their identity tension with non-Muslim culture. Many respondents reported **expecting to feel strange among non-Muslims** and in non-Muslim systems and did not consider the strangeness to be intrinsically Islamophobic. As one male, 23, in the GTA put it, “It’s normal to feel strange. We felt estranged for a long time.” Later he added, quoting a hadith, “Like we’re never going to be white, so ‘give glad tidings to the strangers’. It is imperative that we remain strangers. God wanted us to come here to be uncomfortable.”

While anticipated estrangement means that youth are grounding their challenges in Islamic frames of reference, this did not always translate to a strong religious identity or feeling supported within Muslim communities. Throughout this study, Muslim youth consistently reported that the identity crises they were experiencing left them seeking refuge in Muslim communities for care, guidance, and mentorship; however, the dysfunctionality and even hostility of Muslim communities tended to exacerbate their crisis further. A large number of respondents (74%) felt that their **identity issues were exacerbated by intra-community problems**, including judgement from other Muslims, a lack of community inclusion, and infrastructural problems.

One of the most consistently reported reasons for this was the **scorn or judgment of fellow Muslims** which left them feeling inadequate and even unworthy of their Islam or participation in Muslim communities. Even youth who were heavily involved in their religious community reported that this was an issue for others either due to perceived lesser levels of practice/piety, or due to race, gender, or language. This was something echoed by youth who feel that they belong within Muslim communities, but only conditionally as it related to their perceived piety, noting that that judgment is often the deciding factor in whether youth attend programming in the masjid or not. Sometimes the judgement took an **excessively gendered form** against young Muslim women and was understood *culturally* rather than religiously, especially in South Asian communities.

The issue of judgment extended beyond gender and into **deeply entrenched infrastructural/systemic issues**. Muslim youth reported numerous problems in Islamic institutions, especially masajid, including: a lack of representation (for youth, women and Black Muslims in particular), racism/lateral violence, generational gaps, a lack of quality and relevant programming, and a lack of adequate mentorship.

While some respondents talked at length about how the needs of Muslim youth were neither being heard, nor met, others pointed out that the same generational gaps that exist in families, also exist in Muslim communities and could be the source of the disconnect. Sometimes the gap was described as a racial/ethnic issue or linguistic barrier in terms of **institutional accessibility**. While some Muslim youth considered MSAs, for example, to be “Middle Eastern clubs” that they did not see themselves reflected in and felt similar detachments from mosques

and Islamic centers, others noted that even when they felt their own ethnic background was well-represented; they felt the groups were **not inclusive enough** of others. In particular, youth reported being skeptical of attempts at including Black Muslims, noting that programming in mosques that attempted to include Black Muslims was considered **tokenistic**.

**Gendered exclusion** was also consistently reported as an intracommunity problem that had significant impacts on Muslim youth and their identities. Even in spaces where Muslim women are welcome to contribute, some respondents reported tensions. Sometimes racial or gendered exclusion was parsed as a matter of relevancy in that programming available at mosques or centers, or leadership present there would not serve the needs of Muslim youth.

Numerous youth also reported a **lack of adequate mentorship** in community to help guide youth. One youth noted that even when it is available, the quality and relevance of the mentorship made it a futile effort. Ultimately, in dealing with an ongoing identity crisis and its accompanying stressors, exacerbated by family generational gaps, cultural estrangement and Islamophobia, Muslim youth are not finding the space, solace, programming and guidance they feel they need from their religious communities. These ongoing tensions have serious outcomes for the types of problems that youth are reporting from these challenges.

Youth reported the following outcomes from the primary challenge of ongoing identity crisis and its exacerbating contextual factors. It should be noted that these outcomes were not necessarily directly experienced by youth (although, this was true for many cases - the totals of which are difficult to fully quantify given the nature by which many youth verbalized agreement with one another in focus groups) but are outcomes they may have directly witnessed occurring

in their immediate peer group or about which they felt there were wider, more general trends among Muslim youth. The percentages listed here indicate the frequency by which each of these outcomes were mentioned in interviews and focus groups. The outcomes mentioned included: a lack of community belonging or desire to try to belong (46% reported); mental health problems (65%); affected relationship with Allah (44% detrimental effect; 15% positive effect); forced assimilation or apostasy in themselves or their peers (21%); susceptibility to extremism (11%); drug use and addictions (25%); gang activity (8%); extra-marital sex and teen pregnancy (17%); and suicide or suicidal ideation (13%).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The way forward for Muslim youth in Canada seems tenuous at this point, especially in consideration of the socio-historical background against and from which these challenges are manifesting, namely Christianoform secular society. In light of this fact, it is crucial to note why this policy report is written with the intention to offer recommendations on addressing these challenges. Firstly, throughout the completion of this study, several things became increasingly apparent: Muslim youth have a great deal of clarity about the challenges they face; they speak eloquently and at length about these issues; they speculate on the root causes of their challenges and, to a certain degree, they have youth-driven solutions in mind. However, a lack of support both in their homes and especially in their communities imparts a degree of hopelessness and forced individual survival on the youths.

One of these main manifestations of individual survival is through personal religiosity. As such, the first set of recommendations are directed at youth themselves and follow from the

foundational understanding that in order to interrupt a pattern of dysfunction, it must first be recognized in the individual it has a direct impact on. One outcome of this study, which began to show itself informally in focus groups, is the opportunity for Muslim youth to be validated and understood in their struggles by hearing that other youth share in such struggles. Thus, at the individual level, youth are encouraged to seek everything that fosters their resilience to proactively overcome their challenges, examples of which will be provided below. Placing these recommendations first, however, is not indicative of a sequence by which actions should be taken pertaining to the youth challenges outlined in the findings above; rather, this study vehemently argues to the contrary: many of these recommendations are conditional on the community recommendations which follow, or at the very least, must be simultaneous to them.

#### *INDIVIDUAL MITIGATING ACTIONS*

This study recognizes that much of what follows by way of recommendations are contingent on what resources are made available within Muslim communities and, further, point to cultivating a proactive sense of responsibility over and urgency about one's own knowledge acquisition and involvement:

- Youth should find ways to increase their religiosity individually and collectively in a comprehensive way. They should try to deepen their understanding of religion to reduce doubt and increase confidence and be able to live their religion through sound rational conviction. This also makes them relatively more confident being Muslim outside of religio-cultural communities (and sometimes within them) . They should also seek to increase their faith and spirituality which in itself is an ongoing source of internal resilience and strength that helps with the daily challenges and stresses.
- Ideally, youth should find a venue for continuous, collective learning. Learning should be considered part of their personal development that has to be ongoing. Learning with a group also offers a support group effect where others provide a source of support, encouragement and collegiality in a shared struggle. They should also find reliable religious references that they are comfortable going back to as resources along with knowledgeable people.
- Youth should seek mentorship and support opportunities on their different paths either religious, personal or professional. People with relevant experience and knowledge will

have gone through similar trials and can make it more familiar and can help them find coping mechanisms.

- Youth should engage in programs that foster their identity and help them understand who they are, making them comfortable standing out with a special identity. In educational spaces, programs like Islam Awareness Weeks, cultural days and educational events could facilitate identity-building. In work spaces, some diversity programs exist which make it easier for youth to identify differently but confidently.
- Youth should seek and proactively demand to be present in decision-making and leadership circles within their respective communities.

To be sure, while these individual recommendations are derived in recognition of the fact that the construction of a religious identity is of high importance when forming the identity as a whole; however, this study also recognizes that doing so individually is not a measure of community success or sustainability. In fact, personal religiosity is not a triumph of resilience but a constructed outcome for praxis-based religions in Christianoform secular societies. Given the ongoing nature of these problems and the need for acceptance of some level of perpetual estrangement within non-Muslim Canadian communities due to this foundational incongruity, it becomes clear that pathways to resilience and support cannot hinge on personal religiosity alone but must come under the urgent care of Muslim communities, taking a simultaneous, collective, reconciliatory (and subsequently traditionally Islamic) approach.

#### *LISTENING TO YOUTH PROPOSED SOLUTIONS*

Given that youth reported several mitigating factors for their experience of the primary challenge and its contingent issues (including being male, Arab/Desi and from a higher economic class), summarizing the perceived solutions for building resilience provided by the youth themselves is valuable. Unsurprisingly, most of these youth suggestions were directed at Muslim community leadership, institutions and especially masajid as even respondents who did not report attending

mosque services or events saw community care as a starting point for reducing stressors on Muslim youth – especially in relation to the problem of dual identities. In essence, if the primary identity crisis was nearly inevitable, a place to put meaningful efforts would therefore be internal to Muslim communities, rather than external to them. Many Muslim youth, even those who were no longer involved in Muslim communities, felt that if such communities were run better and offered more of what youth needed in the manners which they require, they could and would provide solace, comfort and support to youth who required it.

The following suggestions were reported by youth on multiple occasions throughout this study, and which will be elaborated on in sections below:

- Assist youth leadership in leading the building of non-judgmental, anti-racist, equitable community groups, religious circles and social spaces
- Train mentors in community as religious scholars with mental health training and other skill sets while ensuring that there are gendered mentors according to youth preferences
- Provide access to relevant and adequate spiritual psychological mental health resources, including grievance circles and counselling support when major tragedies like Christchurch and other vicarious traumas occur globally
- Provide pathways to access balanced and critical Islamic knowledge
- Offer better management for relevant spaces and programming
- Include youth in community centre and masjid decision-making bodies in a meaningful way that does not connote tokenization
- Offer or facilitate the development of spaces for youth to meaningfully contribute

#### *SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH*

Given what the youth themselves have described as challenges experienced within community, along with factors that aid them in overcoming those challenges to cultivate a deep sense of belonging, one major recommendation from this study is for Muslim organizations to recognize and acknowledge the validity of these issues, work towards shifting organizational perceptions

about youth while building trust across generational lines, and ultimately, moving forward to exert purposeful efforts in making youth feel both included and a sense of ownership over Muslim community spaces.

To this end, it is important to recognize and emphasize the autonomy and independence of youth. Before proceeding with practical implementations, it is important to cultivate an understanding that youth are the primary actors in the solution for their challenges. It is not what society or community can do for them; it is how we can all contribute to an environment where youth take ownership of positive change for everyone. It is equally important to recognize that these challenges are not localized for youth; rather, they are challenges facing the community as a whole, but youth recognize them readily, likely because they are disproportionately affected by them. Solutions cannot be compartmentalized to segments within the community. However, some solutions can be incubated in hubs within our community and later expanded to other parts of the community. Further, this shift in understanding about youth can take many forms including, but not limited to:

- Professional development training on inclusivity
- Policy and governance changes for more youth inclusion
- Listening campaigns or mediated conversations across generational gaps to promote reconciliation

#### *ADDRESSING YOUTH NEEDS DIRECTLY*

Recognizing the incredibly powerful potential role community institutions can play in the lives of these youth, the responsibility community has to do so ethically and Islamically, and the relative ease with which community organizations can begin to make significant and immediate



changes, we submit the following recommendations for addressing youth needs directly in light of everything discovered through this study. These recommendations will be divided first by scope and then by themes.

### **By Scope**

At the level of a leading national organization with a clear youth mandate and which is willing to drive the required change, the organization should:

- redesign how youth are sincerely engaged in decision-making and leadership across institutions and all organization levels (not only youth-related projects)
- create non-judgmental youth friendly spaces that are open, accessible and engaging
- offer individual and group mentorship opportunities as part of their services in different spheres. They can even use or extend mainstream mentorship models.
- provide multiple accessible sources for Islamic knowledge that are relevant and easy to understand. These could be in the form of open online resources, study circles in Islamic centres and resources for students in high schools and universities. The organization could also provide resources for educational programs that strengthen Muslims identity (such as history and civilizational contributions of Muslims in the past and present).
- help in providing counselling and social service resources across its centres to provide culturally sensitive professional help for Muslim youth. They could also fund and support chaplaincy services on campuses and in prisons and hospitals
- extend support and do joint programming with organizations that work with at-risk youth and children's services and foster homes and shelters. These are spaces where youth need the most help and they need to feel that the community reaches out to them
- create an open environment for youth to volunteer and get a sense of belonging through participation. Event, projects and activities should be diverse and accessible to cater to different interests of different types of youth
- enable and support initiatives that support youth to publicly express themselves in creative ways

At the level of general Muslim communities, youth and leading organizations should help promote an internal shift in understanding about youth and an inclusive culture through the following campaigns:

- A campaign for inclusive centres that open leadership and real decision-making opportunities for youth
- A campaign to remove gender and racial biases in Muslim spaces and centres
- A campaign to encourage youth to express themselves in different ways and to be proud of their Muslim identity. This can be done by encouraging artistic expression, poetry, spoken work, video production and many other creative activities

At the national level in Canada, youth and leading organizations can also help externally promote a positive healthy environment for youth through the following:

- An organized campaign against structural and cultural Islamophobia which posits a Canada that is not construed on implicit biases against Muslims
- Create Islamic information kits for Muslims to provide others in different professional spaces such as schools, work environment, sports, etc.
- Support Muslims to contribute to and be present in mainstream media

## **By Theme**

### *Representation/Inclusion*

When examining mitigating factors for facing the primary challenge, Muslim youth reported that (especially within Muslim communities), their economic status, gender, race/ethnicity significantly impacted their resilience, sense of belonging and the overall effect of the primary challenge on their ability to live their lives well. Based on a deeper understanding of how those positionalities and privilege affect the challenges Muslim youth face, the following factors can be prioritized – and can loosely be categorized under the heading of representation:

- improving the financial accessibility of Islamic schools and institutional programming;
- making programming more relevant to people of diverse economic statuses, particularly lower income Muslim youth;
- better representation of Muslims with diverse economic statuses on community councils, boards, materials and in other relevant areas;

- consulting with Muslims of lower income brackets on how to improve accessibility of religious and social services and implement their suggestions or provide them with funding to run their own programming;
- assisting with providing social services that meet the needs of economically disadvantaged Muslim youth and supporting the better distribution of financial resources from community to those youth;
- offering financial and career mentorship and paid internships or partner with professionals from all backgrounds to develop and extend such opportunities;
- actively working to confront and extinguish economic prejudice in Muslim communities both directly and systemically;
- recognizing the stigma veiled Muslim women and doubly racialized Muslims (especially Black Muslims) face external to Muslim communities as inspiration to develop better community structures where diversity is emphasized and Desi/Arab ethnic normativity/dominance is dismantled;
- developing programming that goes beyond tokenization through consultation and onboarding non-Arab, non-Pakistani Muslims for development and to hold positions of influence on decision-making masjid and community center boards (especially Black Muslims);
- taking up causes unique to doubly racialized (especially Black Muslim) communities as priorities for all Muslims to address equally and committing resources and funding to do so;
- recognizing the disproportionate stigma, prejudice and systemic violence Muslim women face both inside and outside Muslim communities is the first step as inspiration for developing gender equitable community spaces;
- building equitable spaces with accessibility for Muslim women in terms of physical space and general programming, as well as programming and services which address issues that disproportionately affect Muslim women such as Islamophobia, domestic violence, sexual assault, spiritual abuse and community judgment
- consulting with and onboarding women for these developments, as well as to occupy positions of influence on decision-making masjid and community center boards – and to further challenge Desi/Arab normativity and dominance by specifically recruiting Black Muslimahs and other ethnicities in these spaces;
- assisting Muslim families in creating safe, flexible home environments and healthy relationships with their youth;
- advocating media, government and businesses for better and more authentic representation of Muslim youth overall;
- building safe, inclusive, non-judgmental spaces headed by diversely representative mentors where youth can learn about Deen but also get support for regular youth issues, mental health support, and build long-lasting friendships in their Muslim peer groups;

To expand on a point mentioned above, the notion of inclusion hinges on understanding

belonging –another crucial concept for community leadership, masjid and centres to consider

when addressing the challenges of Muslim youth in Canada. When asked about belonging, only 12% of the youth reported that they felt they belonged in Muslim communities (most of whom acknowledged that this was because they were Arab or “involved”), 24% reported that they did not belong in Muslim communities, 45% reported that their belonging in Muslim communities depended on the prevalence of racism and misogyny factors therein, and 18% reported that their belonging in Muslim communities depended on their degree of practice. It is important to note that while these numbers are quite dismal, the notion of belonging elsewhere was even worse. Finally, only 1.5% of those who responded to questions on belonging felt that they belong in Canada and another 1.5% felt they only sometimes belonged; whereas, 80% of respondents reported that they did not belong in Canada. An additional 17% reported that the question was not relevant to them because they did not consider nationalisms to be a primary category of belonging.

While definitions of belonging abound in academic discursive environments, what matters more for the purposes of this paper is the criteria the youths themselves consider essential for evoking a sense of belonging, especially in Muslim communities. The responses throughout the study were surprisingly varied but youth primarily feel that they belong in any community when they are contributing in some meaningful way, when they found people similar to themselves or they were purposefully welcomed with inclusive rhetoric. Thus, in order to foster *holistically inclusive* environments, Muslim communities should strive to cultivate belonging in each of these ways, not relying on one or another in isolation.

### *Identity-Based Solutions*

Finally, addressing the primary challenge of identity crisis among Muslim youth head-on offers a prudent course of action for community organizations to take. Not only will adequate mentorship and counselling programs offer safe spaces for Muslim youth seeking refuge from the struggle of being non-Christianiform secular in Canada today, but programming centered on fostering a strong, unapologetic Muslim identity in youth must also be considered. The following facets of this type of programming should be taken into account:

- It should be financially accessible, potentially including food provisions at meetings, depending on what form the programming takes
- It should cast a wide net for programming recruitment to try to assist struggling Muslim youth completely outside the purview of Muslim communities, and even actively shunned from them
- It should proceed from an ethos of non-judgment regarding participant praxis and should employ a framework of absolute patience, recognizing that many youth who want to try to access religious knowledge may be on the verge of total secular assimilation or other complicating factors
- It should educate Muslim youth on their religious rights and freedoms in Canada to empower them to advocate for themselves in all contexts
- It should offer balanced, linguistically and financially accessible Islamic knowledge in equal methods of delivery for both men and women
- Masajid/Islamic organizations must proceed from a trauma-informed ethos which acknowledges the wrong some Muslim youth may have experienced within Muslim spaces, striving to offer programming outside of masjid as well, for those who need it.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, individual approaches can be taken to to mitigate the challenges faced by Muslim youth in Canada; however, the outcomes of these approaches are entirely dependent on how active, engaged and receptive Muslim community organizations are in meeting youth needs. Muslim community organizations must lend credence to youth-proposed solutions for their own challenges, centering youth voices in such discussions and community decision-making. In order

to do so, Muslim community organizations must aim to shift perceptions of youth among non-youth community members and stakeholders. Finally, Muslim community organizations must aim to target youth needs directly. Such a strategy can be developed according to the scope and reach of the community organization - either focusing on youth internal to community at the national or local level, or looking outward beyond Muslim community boundaries to foster better environs for all Muslims, especially youth. Addressing youth needs directly must also take a thematic approach. Focusing on representation and inclusion and Muslim identity-based solutions are recommended starting points for community organizations to meaningfully and substantially begin to address the challenges that Muslim youth in Canada face.

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