

SHAPING TOMORROW:

UNDERSTANDING MUSLIM YOUTH NEEDS IN THE WATERLOO REGION

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ABOUT THE MAIN ORGANIZATION: Founded by a handful of Muslim women from diverse backgrounds in 2010, Coalition of Muslim Women of KW (CMW) is a charitable organization empowering women and girls to be leaders and change makers. CMW provides opportunities for personal and professional growth, and leadership and skills development for women while addressing issues of gender-based violence, racism, discrimination and Islamophobia through innovative programming and services, partnerships and collaboration, and advocacy and outreach.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: We acknowledge that this assessment was conducted on the lands traditionally used by the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Neutral People. We also acknowledge the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge, laws, and philosophies of the Indigenous Peoples with whom we share this land today. We also acknowledge the conducting of work by the primary researcher of this assessment from Treaty 6 territory, the traditional lands of Indigenous peoples including nêhiyawak, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux and Métis who have lived, gathered, and passed through here for many thousands of years, and who remain here.



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Content Warning

The information in this report highlights data related to mental health, experiences of Islamophobia, discrimination, and other areas that impact youth wellness. Some content may be challenging to read, and it may remind readers of their own negative experiences. We encourage all readers to prioritize their own well-being when examining this information and to take breaks or stop reading if things become distressing. If needed, the following supports are available to help you:

- Naseeha Helpline 1-866-627-3342
- Nisa Helpline (Sisters only) 1-888-315-6472
- Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868
- Counselling Collaborative of Waterloo 519 - 804 - 1097

Introduction

Muslim youth in the Waterloo region have not been studied in depth as a regional demographic. This report presents the findings of a community assessment intending to inform about Muslim youth health and wellness experiences for organizations looking to support them. Following a brief introduction, this report will explain the methodology of the assessment and then a broader picture will be drawn of key findings in both the survey and focus groups. Analysis will be offered throughout, and this report will conclude with key recommendations for community engagement and future work pertaining to Muslim youth in Waterloo region. It should be noted that in sampling for this assessment, respondents were a mix of unknown and known community members, thus the generalizability of its findings should be limited accordingly.

While a comprehensive literature review is part of developing the background for any robust assessment, the primary focus of this report is its findings and analysis. The most recent and relevant studies to directly inform the research design are listed below and other relevant literature will be pulled into the data findings and analysis sections for the enrichment of this report. The following studies were used to develop the research design for this assessment:

- I-RSS and MAC Muslim youth study (2020)
- Mercy Mission Canada Muslim youth and family wellness (GTA) study (2021)
- Environics 2016 Survey of Muslims in Canada
- Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) 2019 Workforce Census
- Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region (CYPT) Youth Impact Survey

Arising from these key sources and their related literature reviews where available, the following questions were foundational in developing this needs assessment:

- What are the primary challenges Muslim youth in the Waterloo region are facing? How do they understand those challenges?
- What impact do these challenges have on their mental health and wellness?
- What barriers do Muslim youth encounter in mental wellness?
- What sources of resilience are youth already accessing that can be maximized?
- What role can community organizations that serve Muslims play in developing meaningful, youth-driven interventions?
- How do Waterloo Muslim youth concerns, trends and challenges compare to general Waterloo youth and with other Muslim youth nationally?

The methodological framework and demographic data of this assessment were developed out of this background and these questions.

Methodology & Demographics

For this assessment, a combined Survey and Focus Group approach was taken. The survey built on the resources mentioned above to test their findings as hypotheses in this assessment and determine the degree to which those findings are relevant to Muslim youth respondents in Waterloo specifically. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions in the focus groups offered a chance to go more in depth to understand youth needs.

The virtual survey consisted of 262 questions following a flow of different topics or subject areas, including the following: Identity, Family, Peers and Mentors, Community, Health, Experiences, Activities, Islam, and Demographic Questions – determined based on previous literature and organizational goals. Recruitment aimed for broad and diverse demographic representation and included both cold and warm outreach techniques. For this reason, it is important to note that in sampling for this assessment, respondents were a mix of unknown and known community members, thus the generalizability of its findings should be limited.

This assessment also included an enrichment of the survey findings through qualitative, focus groups on Zoom which involved the participation of youth with similar considerations for recruitment and demographic diversity. Recordings were used to produce transcriptions from which note-taking and analysis occurred. The focus groups used semi-structured interview questions in 3 methods of engagement (jam board, discussion, writing reflection) which allowed for organic conversation to yield findings, rather than a hypothesis-based approach that can sometimes direct conversation to specific topics to the neglect of others. It should be noted that not all participants in the focus groups completed the survey prior to participation in the focus groups.

The Sample: Survey

In terms of survey responses, there were 113 responses which complied with the eligibility requirements for the study. These requirements included needing to be Muslim, being between the ages of 13 and 25, and living in the Waterloo region broadly (including Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge, and 4 surrounding townships). Only six responses did not fit this criteria and have not been included. It should be noted that Statistics Canada divides their age categories differently than this assessment did so although they do not map perfectly onto our age range, it is worth noting that the available 2021 census data on the number of Muslims in the Waterloo region between the ages of 15 and 24 showed a total population of 6525, making this a sizable selection from that population.

Focus groups had the same eligibility requirements along with requiring consent and confidentiality forms were signed prior to participation and included individual consent for 18+ respondents and parental/guardian consent for minors. Every effort was made to comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on ethical conduct for research involving humans. These efforts resulted in a focus group sample of 19 participants.

The average age of the survey respondents was 17.6 years old, of which 73% of respondents were female and the remainder were male. (It should be noted that the gender numbers here did not map onto Muslim gender distributions between the ages of 15 and 24 in the Waterloo region from the 2021 census, where 45.97% were male and the rest were female.) There was only one convert/revert to Islam. In terms of sect, the vast majority of respondents were Sunni Muslim, or identified clearly with a Sunni Muslim school of jurisprudence (ex. Hanafi). The few different responses included “just Muslim”, undeclared, mixed Sunni responses and one Shia

113 Respondents

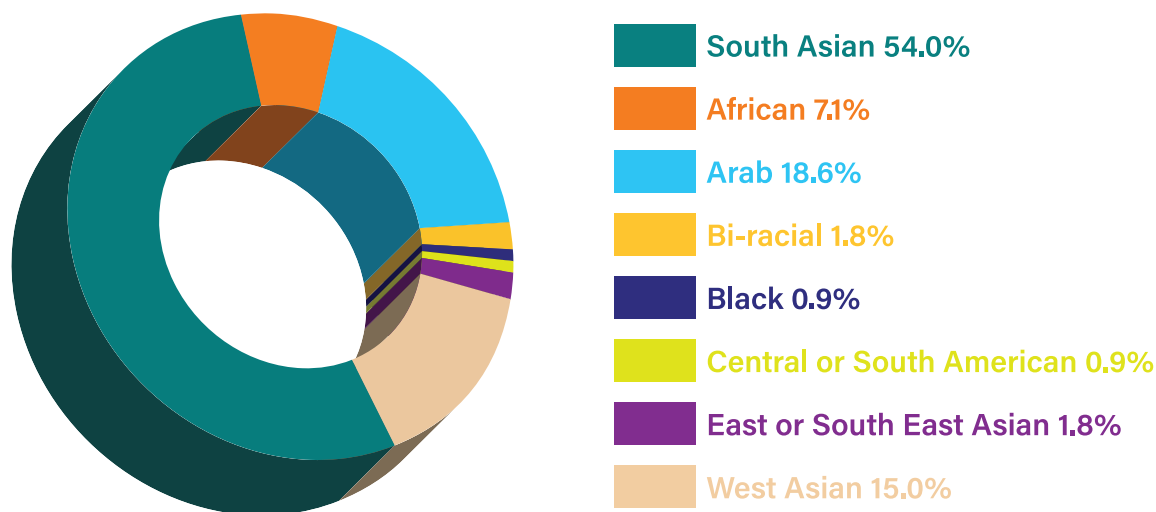
Between 13 and 25
years old

Living in Waterloo region
(including Waterloo,
Kitchener, Cambridge and 4
townships)

2021 census: 6525 Muslim in
region ages 15-25

Racial/ethnocultural diversity in the sample is reflected in figure 1.0 below. It should be noted that the sample maps fairly closely to general ethno-cultural and racial distributions among Waterloo Muslim youth between ages 15 and 24 from census data, with over-representations in the categories of South (41.4%) and West Asians (6.9%) and under-representation among Arabs (24%) and Black (13%) populations. These responses also indicate a completely different racial-ethnic positionality compared to respondents in the CYPT survey who were overwhelmingly white (63%). Several respondents who are likely to be racialized by Canadian society as Black may have chosen to identify in a different manner (ie. as African); however, that qualification has not necessarily been made on their behalf, even taking other demographic answers (such as country of origin and other data) into account.

Fig. 1.0 Survey Sample Demographics - Racial/Ethno-Cultural Background



In terms of diversity, one of the notable points from the sample was in terms of linguistic diversity: 68.1% of the respondents spoke a second language along with English. An additional 17.7% spoke two or more languages along with English. Only 14.2% spoke English only. In terms of the linguistic families represented, the top three additional languages were Urdu (49 speakers), Arabic (25 speakers), and Turkish (17 speakers), followed by French (8), Punjabi (5), Somali (4), and Bengali (3). Other languages represented in the sample were Spanish, Swahili, Russian, Persian, Tigrinya, Pashto, Hindi and Rohingya. Further, 46% of the respondents were born outside of Canada (compared to only 13.8% in the CYPT study), also reflected in the diversity of the immigration status of the sample which included: 21 permanent residents, 4 students on visa, 2 undeclared and the rest Canadian citizens.

The majority of the respondents were attending or had attended only public schooling (66.4%) while 20.4% had only attended Islamic schooling for their studies prior to post-secondary education, if applicable. Other respondents had attended a mix of public and Islamic schooling, and one was home-schooled.

In terms of economic diversity related to employment status, most of the respondents were currently students either in secondary or post-secondary studies. The next relevant category was part-time employment (9 respondents), followed by full-time employment (3 respondents), self-employment (3 respondents), temporary/casual employment (2 respondents). The majority of respondents identified themselves or their families as "middle class," (72.6%) with 18.6% identifying as "upper middle class,"

3.5% identifying as “upper class,” 3.5% as “lower class” and 1.8% undeclared or unsure. Finally, 60% of respondents were either homeowners or their families were, 38% were renters and the remaining 2% were undeclared.

While religiosity remains a challenging concept to define and measure, respondents were asked about both their relationship with their beliefs as well as some of the practices of Islam. Overall, respondents were strong in faith and their perceived relationship with Allah (God). They expressed this faith through practices that are intrinsic to Islam, with the vast majority of respondents regularly praying the five daily prayers and fasting Ramadan. Many also perform nawafil or extra prayers, attend Friday congregational prayers, offer daily supplications and read the Qur’an.

Respondents were also asked about their family living situation. The majority of respondents came from living situations where their parents were still married (87.6% compared with 82.1% from the CYPT study). Only five respondents came from such living situations where this also included an intergenerational home (ie. living with grandparents and/or other family members on top of their immediate family). Five respondents were from divorced homes (4.4% compared with 2.5% in the CYPT study), 2 separated, 3 where one parent was deceased and 1 living with legal guardians. Only two respondents had ever experienced homelessness (compared with nearly 1 in 10 CYPT respondents) and they characterized the experience as “not lasting long,” if at all. The vast majority of respondents were single, with only 2 engaged, 3 married and 1 widowed otherwise. None of the respondents had children.

The Sample: Focus Groups

While 40 respondents registered for participation in the focus groups, in the end, it was 19 respondents who eventually participated in them. The average age of participants was 18 years old and all were female except two male participants. All respondents were Sunni and born Muslim, with the majority being from South Asian (12) and West Asian descent (5). There were also 2 Arabs. All respondents were at least bilingual, if not multilingual, and 7 were born outside Canada. The groups included 4 permanent residents among the rest being Canadian citizens.

The schooling distributions in the focus groups showed that 9 participants had attended or currently attending public schools, 8 having attended or currently attending Islamic schools, 1 having a mixed (public-Islamic) school experience, and 1 having completed schooling at a private international school overseas. All except 2 participants had graduated high school, with 7 having completed some university, and 1 having completed a bachelor’s degree. Thirteen of the participants were still students, 3 were employed part-time and 3 were employed full-time. The majority of participants reported belonging to middle class households (13), with 5 belonging to “upper middle class” and 1 belonging to “lower class.” Additionally, 7 respondents belonged to renting families with 12 belonging to home-owning families. All of them came from households where their parents remained married; only one respondent had one deceased parent. None of the focus group respondents had ever experienced homelessness. Of the 19 total participants, 3 were engaged, 1 was married, the rest were single and none of them had children.

19 Participants

Average of 18 years old

All were at least bilingual,
if not multilingual

Most were single

For the purposes of this assessment, the focus group findings will be demonstrated first, followed by the survey findings, then analysis and a conclusion. The remaining pages of this report comprise policy recommendations for organizations and entities looking to bring impactful outcomes related to the issues discussed here.

Key Focus Group Findings

Focus group interviews were conducted using open-ended questions in a semi-structured conversation designed to maximize participation by inviting different avenues of engagement. These included group brainstorming through the development of collective jamboards, personal reflection and writing, and group discussion. Focus group discussions were centered around 6 main questions designed to invite organic contributions which reflect the trends, issues, and priorities of the respondents themselves. As such, examples for each question were not offered. Initial brainstorming on the jamboards was collective but anonymous so participants could feel free to share their honest first thoughts and impressions as answers to the questions before a deeper conversation was had about the data on the jamboards. Further conversation was facilitated by asking questions of clarification and confirmation around submitted responses, and the cross-fertilization of ideas occurred in all sessions with participants building on and expanding both their own and their peers' responses. For the purposes of ease, the key findings for focus group sessions will be organized according to the questions asked below.

What are the primary challenges Muslim youth face in terms of identity and belonging?

The majority of responses to this question revealed problems faced by respondents which resemble similar issues faced by Muslim youth across Canada: struggling with discrimination and to balance their religious identity with a hostile surrounding. In brainstorming sessions, one focus group put up terms such as "stereotypes, biases," "Islamophobia," "lack of social support and discrimination," and "ignorance about Islam." Not only are such challenges present in the literature examined for this assessment, they were prevalent across the other focus group sessions. Subsequent discussions similarly brought up issues with the environment that surrounds, issues around how Muslims dress and Islamic rules, as well as fear of judgments and racism. Some youth took these observations to another level, noting that these issues resulted in the more pressing matter of "internal stigma regarding their own culture" and/or "not knowing where they fit in." This could result in confusion about which parts of their identities were most important - a key finding of earlier youth studies. The problem of an identity struggle was a step in the direction of also struggling to "maintain their personal values and beliefs," especially if they find it is important to "fit in," which many youth do broadly.

What are the primary challenges Muslim youth face within their families and peer groups (with friends, at school, teachers and so forth)?

When it comes to families, similar struggles as in previous studies were confirmed, including generational differences with parents in particular, as well as struggling with the mixing of culture and religion in some families. Youth who self-identified as more religious struggled with this issue in particular. Youth who had immigrated with their parents or were born to immigrant parents in Canada felt that a primary challenge was having their parents understand the different struggles they faced growing up in Canada versus their home country of origin - something often exacerbated further by generation gaps. Youth participants were clear when they explained that the root of these struggles was a "lack of compassion and understanding"

from people of older groups than them, including parents and teachers, but also just “not being able to have a place to vent” or a place which I have elsewhere called “a soft place to land.” (Al Qazzaz and Valerio 2020)

What are the primary challenges Muslim youth face in terms of community?

When it came to discussing challenges for Muslim youth in community, youth participants were careful to define what they meant by “community.” In some cases, this referred to the broader society or even their local neighbourhood or city, resulting in some of the prior challenges noted above, including discrimination and being misunderstood by older generations. However, when youth were referencing community to mean Muslim communities in general, the feedback on primary challenges there was different. Youth then felt that there are “not enough youth voices in community organizations” and in general, felt they are “not being heard, [or there is] not enough room for sisters in Muslim community organizations in general.” The reasons cited for these issues by participants were “not being given the opportunity to lead [... or] show themselves,” not having enough community leaders and voices representing youth specifically, and overall, having a “lack of role models Muslim youth can [engage with] and look up to.” All of these grievances have been heard in prior youth studies as well, including concerns around community scorn and judgment over religious differences and different levels of practice as well. Interestingly, some of the findings from the survey which will be elaborated on below complicate these findings.

What are the primary challenges Muslim youth face in terms of their personal health and wellness?

When it came to conversations around personal health and wellness, youth participants mainly brought up issues around mental health - some stemming from a lack of social support and understanding about their struggles from other Muslims, and some stemming from “struggles with feelings of discrimination.” Others noted a tendency to withdraw and isolate from others while experiencing these struggles, and several participants mentioned these issues in relation to problems “finding a good balance between Deen [an Islamic way of life] and Dunya [earthly life],” “fitting in Deen,” or “balancing social life and responsibilities” often as they pertain to Muslim ways of being, but also in relation to what were characterized as “normal youth challenges with work-life-school balance.” Physical health issues were not mentioned by participants.

What kind of experiences have you had with Islamophobia and/or other forms of discrimination? Can you share some of those experiences with the group?

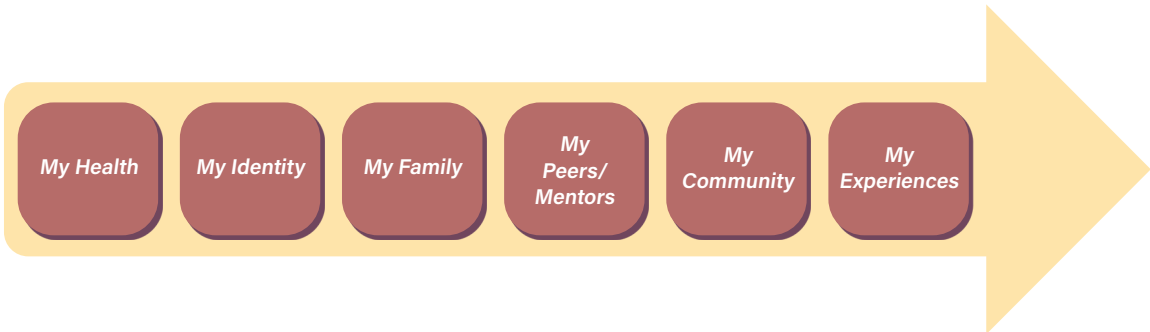
Similar to the findings of the survey which will be expanded on below, participants in the focus group shared incidents of Islamophobia that they had either experienced or witnessed which tended to revolve around impersonal acts of verbal abuse, such as being sworn at in the street or being called terrorists by strangers at the mall, or personal acts of discrimination and prejudice, including stereotyping and “infantilization.” Both of these issues were heightened in cases of Muslim visibility, especially the wearing of the hijab. One respondent relayed a story about hijabi girls being discriminated against at the pool for wearing modest swimwear, with their aggressors claiming they would “spread corona[virus] all over the pool” while wearing it - a common enough racist trope about Muslim womens’ dress and hygiene. Participants reported that the incidents weighed on them and “left them afraid to speak up” for themselves, especially in light of anti-Muslim violence seen in the Quebec Mosque shooting or the killing of Our London Family.

In terms of your Islam, can you tell me about your relationship with your religion and its practices? How does your Islam impact your everyday experiences?

The final question brought a noticeable shift in energy and enthusiasm for each focus group in which it was asked. Participants became physically more engaged, sitting up and leaning forward to the camera where they may have been slouching or disengaged before. They also began to smile more and were visibly happy to answer the question. All respondents noted that Islam had a positive impact on their everyday experiences by guiding their behaviour and helping them to focus on and prioritize “what really matters” from an Islamic perspective. These could mean being reminded that Allah (God) would “reward us” for any small issue they encountered, or it could mean “focusing on the destination” or “the Akhirah” [This is an Islamic term meaning the Hereafter following this earthly life in which judgment and destinations for all human beings will be decided by God.] One respondent noted that the Islamic expectation that life would be easy helped her manage disappointment when things got difficult, stating, “If this life was meant to be easy then we wouldn’t be able to enjoy the pleasure of Jannah [paradise] because everything would have been just given to us, whereas if we go through the struggles of this dunia [earthly life], we will know that we will be rewarded with so much better.” For other respondents, Islam for them meant having community supports and family around them which made their practice easier and by extension (in their understanding), their lives.

Key Survey Findings

With 262 questions on the survey, it would be impossible to cover all of the possible points of interest and findings that have come out of the survey results in this single report. That said, particular attention will be given to the results that seem to speak to the findings of other studies, as well as those which speak to the research questions from which this study began, especially questions around mental wellness.

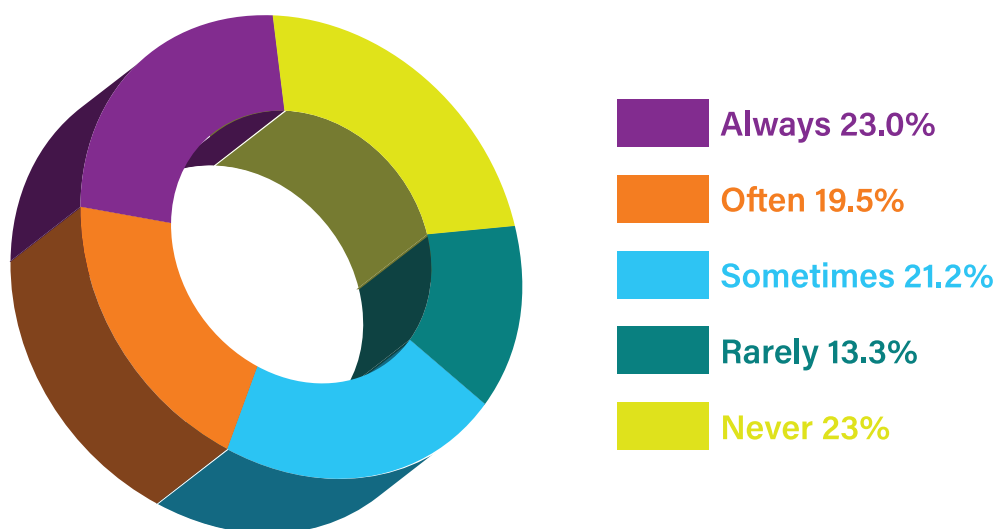


My Health

While mental health has been a major topic of study in the literature about Muslim youth in Canada, most of the attention regarding this issue is paid to understanding mental health stressors, including Islamophobia and sometimes family issues, as well as studying the positive impact of religious practices or beliefs on Muslims in general; however, much less attention is paid to Muslim youth overall, including physical activity, self-perceptions, life satisfaction, and other key health markers. Even if such topics are studied in general, youth populations are included less frequently. This study combined both health aspects for the survey leg of this study. The results below show numerous insights into the overall health of Muslim youth in Waterloo region and where possible, those findings will be analyzed and compared with existing general youth data.

In terms of mental health, 23% of Muslim youth respondents reported always experiencing challenges with their mental health (including anxiety and depression for example). For context, another 19.5% reported these challenges often and 21.2% reported it sometimes. Another 23% of the Muslim youth respondents reported never struggling with their mental health.

Fig. 1.1 Frequency of Experience of Challenges With Mental Health (Including Anxiety, Depression)



Stress has a large impact on mental health and while the distributions are slightly different, a total of 74.3% of Muslim youth respondents feel stressed or distressed either 'always,' 'often,' or 'sometimes.' Feeling sad or hopeless for several days in a row similarly affected nearly two-thirds (60.2% compared with 51.5% CYPT respondents) of respondents at least sometimes, and over half (53.1%) of respondents reported feeling lonely at least sometimes, if not often or always (compared with 34.4% of CYPT respondents).

When it comes to accessing mental health support in the past or currently, only 33.6% of Muslim youth respondents had done so. Mental health resources accessed by youth for this support included, in order of frequency of access: school counselor, family doctor, social worker, imam, mindfulness practices, medication, psychotherapist, psychiatrist, hospital, and public counselor. For applicable respondents, they were asked about their experiences in accessing this support and the results were mixed. Those with positive experiences offered brief testimonies such as, "it was positive and helped," "Overall good, it takes a lot of time to actually learn and use strategies that help long term," "overall good," and "it went well; we were covered by insurance; I was supported by my parents after some time; the whole thing was helpful and impactful." For several respondents, the experiences they had were negative until they found a Muslim therapist who better understood them. For others with completely negative experiences, they reported that some practitioners just "made everything worse," or that "all have been terrible, never helpful, and always been unsatisfied." Another respondent cited trust issues, particularly with "many nurses in the hospital ...[they] were nice to my face but as soon as they left the room they would backbite and gossip about other patients."

In terms of diagnoses, only 5.3% of Muslim respondents had been diagnosed with a mood disorder (compared to 9.2% of CYPT respondents), and 12.4% had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (compared to 15.1% of CYPT respondents). The lower numbers do not necessarily reflect lower prevalence among Muslim youth respondents (though this is a possibility that requires further study), but might be impacted by lower patroning of mental health practitioners who could offer mental health diagnoses. Additionally, another 10.6% had received an alternative diagnosis (not measured in the CYPT study) and included eating disorders, psychosis, and OCD, among others. It should be noted that OCD is technically classified as an anxiety disorder meaning that the prior numbers could be higher than reported.

Importantly, Muslim youth respondents were then asked about some of the more commonly perceived ways that they might cope with stressors, issues or to just “have fun,” some of which were named in previous studies of their peers nationally and included using drugs or alcohol. 84% of respondents reported having never used drugs or consumed alcohol. Only 5 total respondents used drugs or alcohol often or always.

In terms of self-harm, while the responses were still overwhelmingly negative with 69.9% of Muslim youth respondents reporting that they have never self-harmed, 13.3% reported they had done it rarely and the remaining 16.8% self harmed sometimes, often, or always. A total of 25.6% of respondents reported contemplating suicide at least sometimes, if not often or always, and a further 15% of respondents had attempted suicide. It is unclear the degree to which these findings would be generalizable to the wider Waterloo region Muslim youth population.

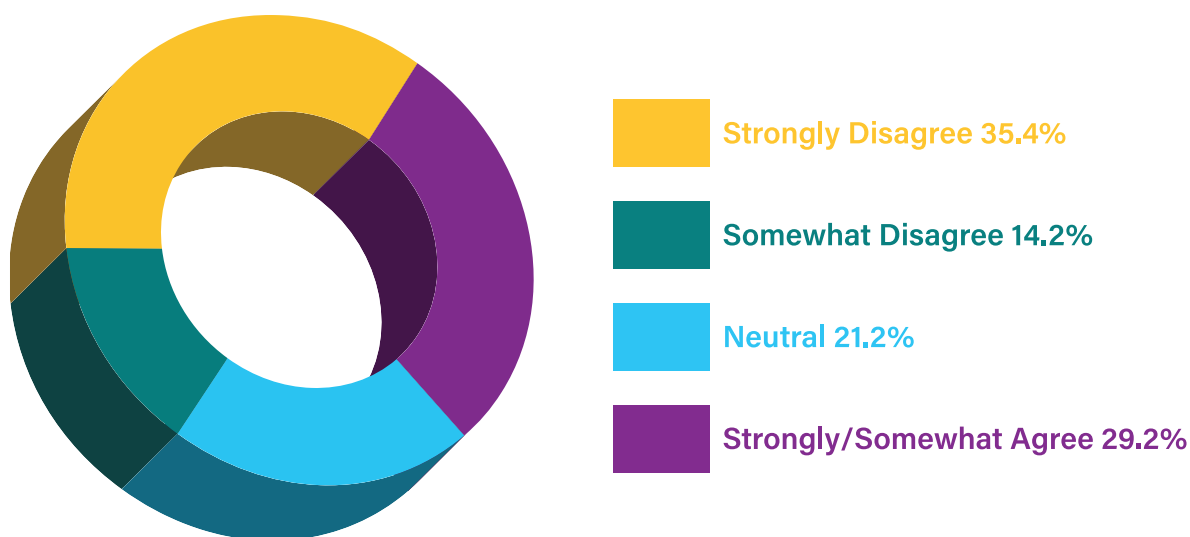
When it came to physical health, Muslim youth respondents slept an average of 7.07 hours per day (including daytime naps), compared with 7.8 hours on average for CYPT respondents. In terms of weekly light physical activity, respondents averaged 5.4 hours (compared to 5 hours for CYPT respondents) and 2.8 hours vigorous exercise (compared to 1.5 hours for CYPT respondents).



My Identity

Survey respondents did not seem to feel as confused about or to feel a conflicted sense of their own identities as the other sessions and earlier literature would seem to imply, however, it remains an ongoing issue in terms of being a challenge some respondents face. While 29.2% of respondents either somewhat or strongly agreed to having felt conflicted about their identity in the recent past, the point remains that 70.8% were either neutral on the topic (21.2%), somewhat (14.2%) or strongly disagreed (35.4%) about it.

Fig. 1.2 Feeling Conflict of Identity in the Recent Past



Similarly, nearly a third (31%) of respondents somewhat or strongly felt that sometimes their identity fits in nowhere fully; whereas differing numbers pertaining to belonging within their home communities will be expounded on below. When asked specifically about balancing their Muslim identity in a Western context, Muslim youth reported struggling often 18.6% of the time, and always 8% of the time. These perceived discrepancies between the different parts of both this assessment and other studies can be understood in a few ways: first, Muslim youth in semi-structured interviews may not have been reporting challenges they themselves experience but may have been offering perceptions of the experiences of other youth peers. Second, though the numbers are lower than expected given what was found in the focus group portion of this assessment as well as in previous studies, the findings remain higher than the negative identity experiences of non-Muslim youth. It is unclear the degree to which a sense of belonging in Muslim youth has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic whereas in the general youth population in Waterloo region, the impact has been severe. (ie. in 2017-2018, 83.9% reported a very strong or somewhat strong sense of belonging in community versus 2021 reporting 64.1%).

Notably, any struggles with identity faced had a negligible impact for the majority of Muslim youth respondents' ability or willingness to practice their Islam; however, some numbers in the impact category are significant enough to warrant attention from community organizations looking to assist them. In any case, 39.8% of respondents reported it never had an impact and a further 30.1% stated that it rarely did so. Only a few respondents said it had an impact sometimes (7.1%) or always (3.5%). Relatedly, in the My Islam portion of the survey, religious identification and faith were mostly strong, even in respondents who had

experienced significant adversity. When asked about whether or not the challenges they experienced had negatively impacted their relationship with Allah, the majority found this not to be the case.

The converse question was also posed to participants who responded in a fairly similar manner and respondents in the vast majority noted that the challenges they experienced had actually positively impacted their relationship with Allah.

While the overwhelming majority of participants had no doubts about Islam as a result of their experiences (81.4%), 14.2% responded that they "sometimes" did and 4.4% responded that they did in general. Further, while 89.4% of the participants did not consider leaving Islam recently or in the past, 8% still answered that they had considered, and 2.7% considered it sometimes. While these numbers remain concerning, the youth were then asked to describe their experiences if they had considered leaving Islam. Almost all of those who had considered it chalked this up to "normal" or "expected" doubts in their youth that they believed they outgrew with time and actually led to greater faith later on. Others felt their doubts were related to the behaviour of other Muslims, and not feeling like they measured up or belonged in Muslim communities. Only one participant found practicing Islam challenging to sustain, another felt they disagreed with some points in the religion, and yet another respondent considered leaving due to a prior relationship with a non-Muslim and felt that it would be easier - a relationship which they appeared to have left. Overall, the level of connection the youth respondents have to their Muslim identities remains strong and the follow up questions make an important case for the necessity of qualitative work to expand on statistical results.

Pride in being Muslim produced strong affirmative results (77% strongly always agree) in respondents which might also indicate a sense of love for Islam that superseded a sense of individual Muslim identity - something really in line with an Islamic communal worldview.

Thus it appears that even if Muslim youth respondents experienced other detrimental impacts from a friction or perceived incongruence in the environment, this does not always translate into a direct negative impact on their religious identity and beliefs. This finding is in keeping with other studies on Muslim youth specifically and Muslim religiosity more broadly, which can point to religion itself as a resilience factor for practitioners.

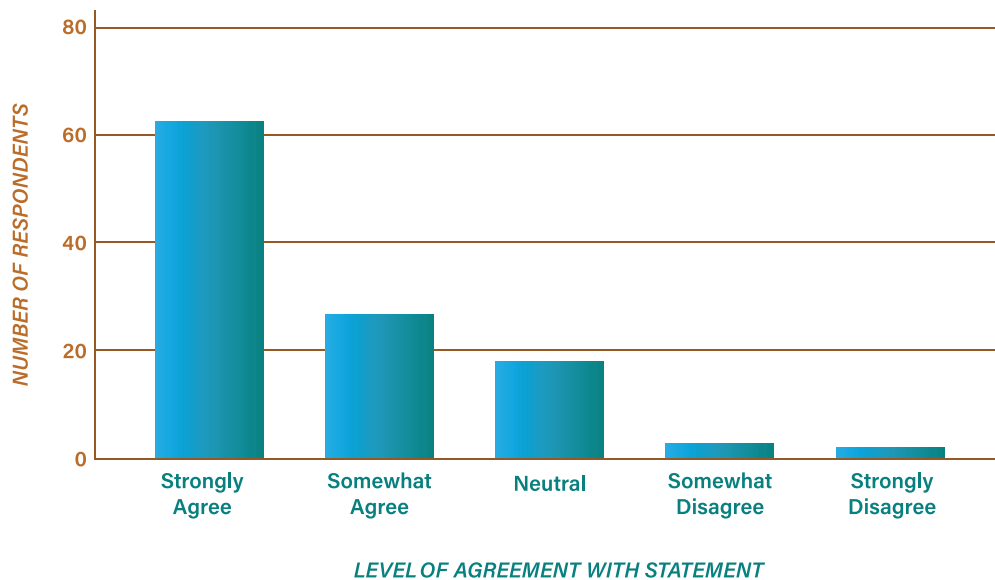
My Family

Questions pertaining to family challenges or dynamics seem to correlate with some of the responses given in semi-structured interviews. 71.7% of Muslim youth respondents (strongly, mostly, or somewhat) feel that their parent(s)/guardian(s) do not always understand what matters to them. A further 66.4% of Muslim youth respondents (strongly, mostly, or somewhat) feel that their parent(s)/guardian(s) do not always understand them at all, pointing to a connection between a sense of self and their personal priorities. At the same time, despite not feeling understood by their parents, this did not necessarily translate into having a negative relationship with their parents. In fact, a combined 79.6% of respondents felt that they have a positive relationship with their parents, with the majority (55.8%) feeling this was strongly the case.



Fig. 1.3 Having a Positive Relationship with One's Parent(s)

On the whole, I have a positive relationship with my parent(s)/guardian(s).



It seems that the misalignment in being understood comes from two places, potentially, based on responses related to other questions in this section: first, having families generally willing to help youth make decisions (a combined 81.4% somewhat or strongly agree this is the case, comparable to 87.6% in the CYPT study) and help youth in general (a combined 78.9% somewhat or strongly agree this is the case, compared with 82.5% in the CYPT study), yet at the same time, feeling less able to talk to their families about their problems (only 46.1% somewhat or strongly agreed they could, compared with 61.6% of CYPT respondents); and simultaneously, despite largely feeling like their own goals align with their parents' expectations of them (only 10.6% strongly felt there was no alignment), they still reported (more significantly) that their parents' expectations of them were too high (a combined 57.5% feel somewhat, mostly and strongly that this was the case). This was the case more often when it came to conflicts pertaining to school, rather than work, friends, or interests. It is worth noting that some of the gender issues in community that were mentioned in focus group interviews did not translate to problems in respondent families.

Finally, the overwhelming majority of respondents' families had never had experiences with child protective services or Children's Aid Society (95.6%) with several other respondents answering that they did not know.

My Peers & Mentors

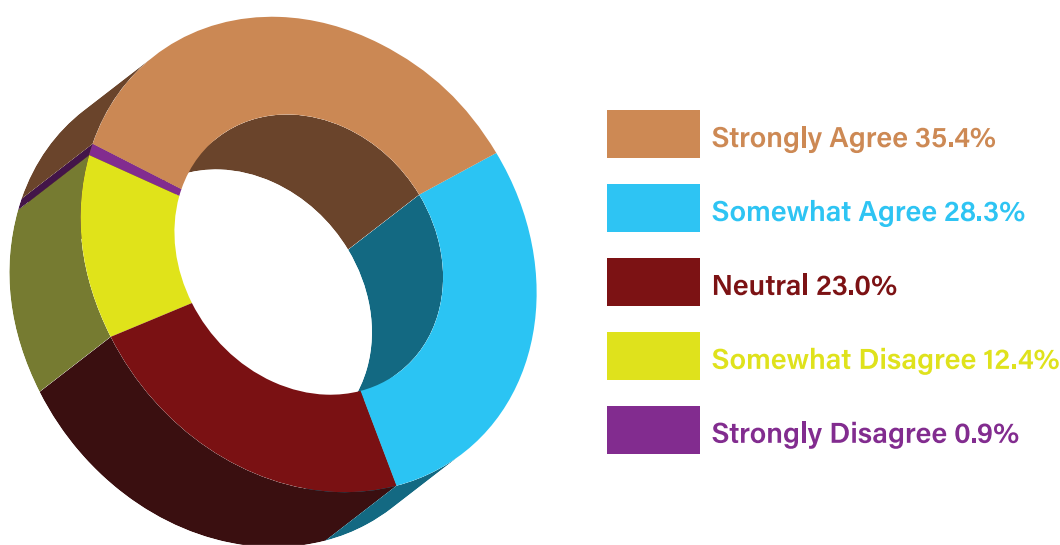
In the prior youth studies, Muslim youth noted that the lack of mentorship opportunities in community as well as pressure from their peers could contribute negatively to their overall identity and sense of belonging. In this assessment, many youth felt that they mostly or strongly (40.8% combined) had a strong bond with at least one positive role model in their lives, and for many, this mostly or strongly translated into a strong bond with a mentor as well (combined 48.7%). The numbers for a strong emotional bond with at least one other person in their life generally (unspecified) were higher (46.9% strongly agree and 23.9% somewhat agree compared to 50.1% and 35.9% for CYPT respondents respectively).

While these questions did not specify where youth were finding their mentors or role models, a later question about community shed some light on the fact that many youth respondents, generally, feel they can access quality mentorship in the Muslim community.

As most of the respondents were students, capturing their experiences with their teachers was also important. In the CYPT study, 83.1% of respondents felt their teachers accept them as they are; in this assessment, students only agreed with that statement strongly 34.5% of the time, and mostly agreed 27.4% of the time. While 74.8% of CYPT respondents felt their teachers treated them fairly, only 35.4% of this assessment's respondents felt that was strongly the case, and 28.3% felt it was mostly the case.

Fig 1.4 Perception of Fairness in Treatment From Teachers

Teachers treat us fairly.



In the CYPT study, a mere 59.8% felt they could trust their teachers, whereas in this assessment, less than a third of respondents (31%) strongly felt that was the case, with 30.1% of respondents giving a neutral response on the question.

For applicable respondents who were also in the workforce in some capacity, the sense of being treated fairly there was higher, as was the general sense of being accommodated at work for their religious beliefs, practices, and needs. However, when it came to feeling that they could trust their employer, only 27.4% of those who answered felt that this was strongly the case, with 32.3% offering a neutral response on the question. Similar results were reported in their trust of their coworkers.

In terms of friends, the split between youth respondents who felt they lack close friends, those who were neutral about it and those who have them was fairly even across the board. (23.9% strongly felt they lacked close friends compared to 26.4% of the CYPT respondents.) When it came to close relationships, however, the majority of Muslim youth respondents strongly felt they have close relationships that provide them with a sense of emotional security and well-being (69.5% somewhat or strongly agree). Given the above numbers, it might indicate that these close relationships are family-based for Muslim youth respondents.

My Community

In the previous studies of Muslim youth, qualitative work brought forth concerns about the level of belonging and acceptance that youth feel within Muslim communities and how a sense of exclusion or community scorn can exacerbate their overall challenges with their identities. Other more general youth assessments examined the degree to which youth felt they were accepted and had a sense of belonging in their wider community, and looked at the potential impact of those on their overall wellness. As in the focus groups for this assessment, the questions about community were understood to be divided between Muslim communities specifically and their wider community, more broadly. The findings here will start with those pertaining to Muslim communities first.

Contrary to the findings in previous studies, and to some of the themes pulled out of the qualitative phase of this study, the majority of Muslim youth respondents agreed or were neutral that Muslim community spaces are welcoming and non-judgmental (37.2% strongly, 25.7% somewhat, and 20.4% neutral). This was despite the fact that 20.4% of youth experienced negativity, judgment or hostility in Muslim community spaces; 9.7% experienced discrimination due to their race or ethnicity in Muslim community spaces; and 10.6% had experienced discrimination due to gender in the same spaces. Notably, only 2 respondents experienced discrimination due to economic class in Muslim community spaces.

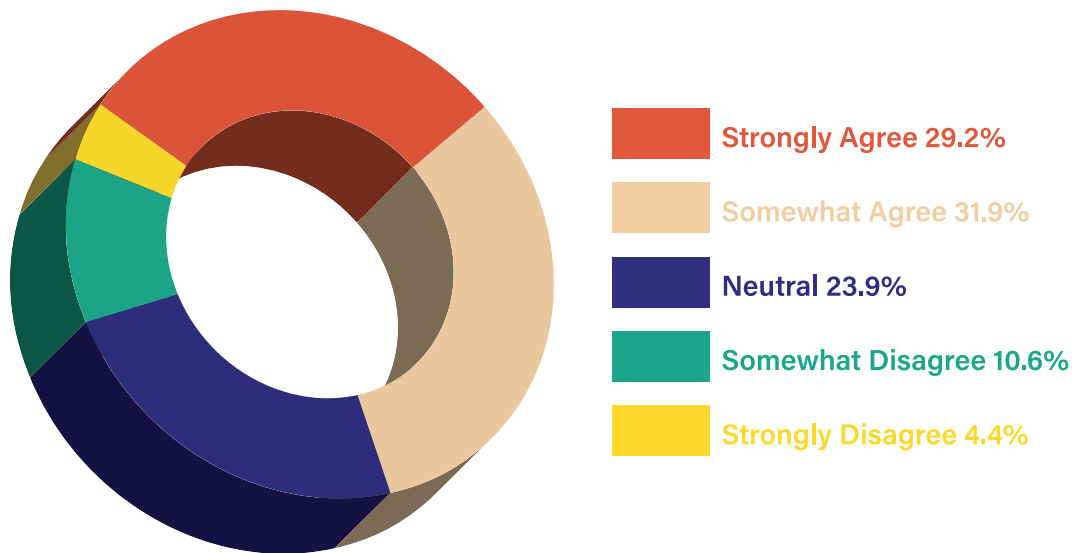
Additionally, most respondents did not find that the challenges they faced broadly were made worse by Muslim community issues (19.5% strongly disagreed, 22.1% somewhat disagreed and 36.3% were neutral). Overall, the majority of respondents felt that Muslim community spaces were safe for them. Over half of the respondents (50.4%) strongly feel welcome in mosques, and 25.7% feel somewhat welcome despite only 9.7% of respondents always attending programming in Islamic centres, and 19.5% attending often. Only 4.3% either felt they were somewhat or strongly unwelcome in mosques, and 25.7% attended programming in Islamic centres almost never, or 19.5% never. Attendance at programming in cultural community centres was even less with a combined 55.7% almost never or never attending there.

A sense of welcome versus a sense of belonging in Muslim communities, with the latter being greater overall (35.4% always felt they belonged, 31.9% felt it often, and 20.4% sometimes), could indicate that Muslim youth respondents have a sense of belonging to Islamic institutions, even when those places are not as welcoming for them. This could be related to a positive sense of religious entitlement of access to religious spaces overall. This idealized perception might have impacted results regarding the perception of mosques as inclusive of all races and ethnic backgrounds (48.7% strongly agreed and 25.7% somewhat agreed), and may also be related to the racial-ethnocultural background of the respondents, the majority of whom were belonging to dominant communities represented in Islamic centres such as Arabs and South Asians.

When it came to the question about feeling like a valued member of their community, neither the CYPT report, nor this assessment specified for respondents what was meant by community. That said, the majority of respondents for this study strongly (29.2%) and somewhat (31.9%) felt this was the case, compared to 18.6% and 36.6% of CYPT respondents respectively. The higher numbers in this assessment could be attributed to Muslim youth respondents understanding the question to be about their religious community and/or the wider global Ummah; they may also understand their 'value' in Islamic terms.

Fig. 1.5 Perception of Being a Valued Member of Their Community

Feeling like a Valued Member of Community



An important part of conceptualizing community for the majority of respondents is school, especially owing to the fact that the majority of them were currently still secondary and post-secondary students. While CYPT respondents were a younger demographic sample, so their understanding of what school entails would be different, it felt important to also pose questions about school to this study's age range. Muslim youth respondents tended to feel strongly about how much they like school with 33.6% who like it a lot (compared to 14.5%), and 23.9% (47.4%) who like it a bit. Where 9.1% of CYPT respondents didn't like it at all, only 8% of Muslim youth felt the same. Over half of Muslim youth (54%) felt their school is a nice place to be, and 27.4% were neutral (compared to 68.4% of CYPT respondents); 69.1% of Muslim youth felt their school rules were fair compared to 68.5% of CYPT respondents; and 60.2% of Muslim youth felt they belong at school versus 62.3% of CYPT youth.

School and community findings that are also pertinent here relate to youth activities and involvement. The majority of Muslim youth have always or often participated in local events in support of a charitable organization to a higher degree than youth in the CYPT study. Similarly, CYPT respondents were asked the same about participation in a public demonstration or protest and 15.5% responded that they had, compared to 33.6% of Muslim youth (always or often). While 11.23% of CYPT youth had written a letter or email to a municipal official about something that mattered to them at least once in the past 12 months, 23.9% Muslim youth responded that they had done the same. Approximately 5.3% of Muslim youth has written a letter to the editor, compared with 2% of the broader youth population in Waterloo region.

Finally, in terms of community, 82.5% of Muslim youth felt they were either very safe or reasonably safe from crime in their neighbourhood compared to 91.2% of CYPT respondents. The discrepancy could be related to significant experiences of Islamophobic verbal harassment, some of which were mentioned in the focus group findings and will be further outlined in depth under "My Experiences" below.

My Experiences

In the focus group sessions, Muslim youth participants were asked about their direct experiences with Islamophobia or discrimination, whereas in the survey, this was only part of the picture captured in this section. The following statistics are pulled directly from survey responses:

- 31.9% of respondents have experienced discrimination as a Muslim at school (discrimination being subjectively defined)
- 18.6% of respondents have experienced harassment, threats, or violence for being a Muslim
- 43.4% of respondents have witnessed family members experiencing Islamophobia
- 34.5% of respondents have witnessed friends experiencing Islamophobia

When asked to elaborate on these experiences for those who had responded in the affirmative, a myriad of incidents and perspectives were shared, the majority of which were verbal abuses experienced by themselves or witnessed for others and/or some systemic discrimination, particularly in school settings. The majority of the incidents, similar to those in the focus group interviews, were centered on visible Muslims, especially girls or women wearing the hijab, whether the youth themselves or their family member. These findings are unfortunately in line with much of the work done on gendered Islamophobia which points to disproportionate abuses experienced by Muslim women related to their high visibility. (Zine 2006; Ahmad 2018)

Including very few of the many examples provided here is important for bearing witness to what Muslim youth respondents experience and hold in their narratives, and which can even sometimes be normalized to the point of hardly recognizing the incidents any longer. Related to the hijab, a few examples that respondents shared, included:

- *"My friend couldn't make the volleyball team because she was the only hijabi."*
- *"Someone shouted at my mom for wearing hijab."*
- *"Someone on the street called my hijab a towel."*
- *"I was told by a classmate that I was the most likely to shoot up the school. I was the only one wearing hijab in that class."*
- *"I've seen some people saying things and acting towards my mom as if she's stupid or is not capable of doing basic things because she's wearing hijab."*
- *At a pool, I saw my friend wearing a covering swimsuit and being harassed by a lady. I saw my mother being looked at weirdly because of her hijab."*

Another repeated issue was discrimination in school settings, ranging from harassment from other non-Muslim students and teachers, to being prevented from basic religious practices by administrative or teaching staff. Respondents shared:

- *"Stupid boys at school made Muslim terrorist jokes, and bomb jokes."*
- *"Student in a class made a racist comment. When he realized I wasn't going to let him get away with it, he continued to taunt me around the school. Teachers didn't do much. They said they were working on it but nothing ever happened."*
- *"At my highschool, my principal would always prevent the MSA from holding any sort of event be it cultural or religious, and if not prevent, then she'd make it extremely difficult."*
- *"Teachers denying us/being rude and giving lower marks"*

Unfortunately, if these incidents weren't enough, 44.2% of Muslim youth respondents had experienced bullying at some point in their lives (8% in the previous 2-3 months), much of which was related to their Muslim and/or ethnocultural identities. Youth respondents reported that they were bullied for wearing hijab, being immigrants, for "being brown," and other related points, including general teasing for appearance and especially for weight.

When it came to other adverse experiences, Muslim youth respondents ranked low for issues like gang involvement (97.3% had zero involvement and the remainder "preferred not to say"). As mentioned in the demographics of this survey sample, only 2 respondents had experienced homelessness for short periods of time. With regards to food security, while Muslim youth respondents reported going to bed hungry always (6.2%), often (8%) and sometimes (22.1%) (compared with 4.8% of CYPT respondents) it is not necessarily the case the Muslim respondents did so for lack of food in their home. In fact, only 2.7% reported not having enough quality food in their home always or often, and only 3.6% reported that their family could not afford quality meals always or often which represent numbers a bit lower than CYPT respondents.

Highest Impact

Finally, when the Muslim youth respondents were asked, in an open-ended question, to define what had the most significant impact on their lives (for better or for worse) in the past year, the responses were mixed between positive and negative impacts; however, the youth had clarity for themselves regardless. Responses which dominated negative impact included the Covid-19 Pandemic which contributed to isolation and other social issues, as well as school stresses, especially "excess" homework, academic worries, lack of flexibility, the stresses of online learning, and transitioning to university. Some respondents mentioned that physical health issues had impacted their year, including cancer and other health problems. In responses regarding positive impacts, religion and family dominated with respondents mentioning that their experiences during Ramadan, in better establishing their prayer, and in adopting the hijab in a permanent manner helped them over the last year. Close relationships with parents were also mentioned numerous times.



Conclusion



This assessment has made clear that Muslim youth respondents in the Waterloo region contend with issues similar to not only Muslim youth across the country but general youth issues in the region more broadly. In some cases, Muslim youth respondents have better outcomes than the general youth population and in other cases, those outcomes are worse.

Relating to mental health, Muslim youth respondents tend to experience sadness, hopelessness and loneliness more (despite having comparable numbers for close bonds, mentoring relationships, and friendships as the general youth population), while also accessing mental wellness support less. Muslim youth respondents also tend to sleep less but are more physically active overall. While avoiding poor coping tools like drugs and alcohol, a segment of the sample still experienced other forms of self-harm and suicidal ideation.

Identity questions yielded complex answers regarding a sense of belonging but one consistent finding was a strong sense of religious identity, faith, and in some cases, practice, as well as overall strong pride in being Muslim. Muslim youth respondents also conveyed relatively positive impressions of Muslim spaces overall and generally feel more valued by their community than non-Muslim respondents in other studies.

In Muslim respondent families, the results were comparable with other studies of general population youth in that they feel supported by their families; however, notably, Muslim respondents overall feel less able to talk with them about their problems. It's clear that in families where this communication is made possible, the impact is overwhelmingly positive.

Issues within the education system mostly revolved around teacher-student relationships for Muslim respondents, especially related to acceptance from their teachers, less of a sense of trust in them, and feeling they are treated unfairly by them

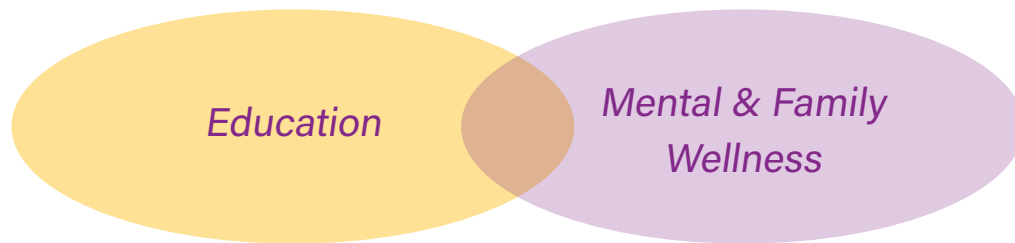
Teachers, of course, have an enormous impact on student well-being and academic outcomes so these findings are troubling and point to a need for training and awareness building with them. These results arose despite the fact that Muslim respondents tend to feel stronger about liking school and had comparable results to the general youth population about the fairness of their school rules and sense of belonging in the school broadly. Overall, school and study stresses seem to be a point where more attention is warranted.

Muslim youth respondents did not experience homelessness or food insecurity in a significant way. They tend to be much more engaged in local charitable events, protests or demonstrations, and other forms of civic engagement than the general youth population. That said, they do not feel as safe overall in their neighbourhoods.

As such, it seems that the primary challenges Muslim youth respondents from this assessment are facing include mental and family wellness support, assistance with managing the demands of their studies and school stresses, alongside access to spaces for navigating complex identity issues they may have. In particular, it is important to develop avenues for strengthening family communication in support of the challenges they face, as well as to improve overall systems navigability for Muslim families seeking to access mental health support. Although Muslim youth respondents do not appear to be involved in drugs, alcohol, gang activities, or other adverse experiences in a significant way, they still experience adverse side effects of their negative experiences that must be properly addressed. While it appears that Muslim identity and Islam in general are not only not heavily impacted by the challenges these respondents face, and that respondents themselves report it might serve as a source of their resilience and perseverance, it remains unclear the degree to which that is the case. It does appear that the impact is more practical in that some of the practices of an Islamic way of life, while not preventing respondents from experiencing mental wellness issues, did help with the avoidance of more detrimental outcomes and inspiring their persistence in the face of such struggles.



Policy Recommendations White Sheet



These policy recommendations follow from the above report and are aimed at offering tangible suggestions about services, programs, and assistance for organizations looking to support Muslim youth in the Waterloo region. That said, policy recommendations without the suggestions of the youth respondents themselves would be incomplete. For this reason, the recommendations of Muslim youth respondents are amplified in this section of the report.

Policy recommendations for Muslim youth in Waterloo region fall under two main categories: education related issues, and mental and family wellness.

Education

Muslim youth respondents have noted that, despite their overall enjoyment of it, school is a significant stressor for them and that balancing their responsibilities there with the rest of their lives has an impact on their overall well-being. Notably, in the findings of this assessment, it appears that one of the primary points of concern for respondents is their relationships with their teachers, including any potential discrimination or trust issues they may have with them. For this, there should be a concerted effort to educate public school teachers about Islam, Muslim ways of being, and the needs of Muslim students overall.

The work of Coalition of Muslim Women would be highly beneficial in addressing these issues, particularly their education, training, and workshop initiatives related to Islamophobia. This option is excellent for schools wishing to prioritize team-building and group learning among their education staff for live training (in-person or online) where they can ask questions, explore, and generally do the hard work of addressing and unlearning their biases in a safe, curated setting.

Additionally, a recent and free online course, Islam Awareness, was developed specifically for educators in Ontario by the Muslim Association of Canada with funding from the Ministry of Education. This resource should be promoted by stakeholder organizations to public school educators, local school boards in the Waterloo region, and with teachers' associations.

With regards to the stresses of school life, there are several approaches which community organizations could take, including the development of Muslim study and support groups, as well as the creation of Islamo-centric workshops to inform and help young Muslims manage these issues, including transitioning to university. An excellent set of examples that could serve as a template for future workshops would be the Changemakers Youth Initiative from Nisa Helpline - an ARAP funded initiative which includes workshops and toolkits for a variety of related topics including family wellness, time management and study tips all within an Islamic ethos. The development of further topics mentioned in this study would be beneficial, as would the promotion of these existing resources among Muslim youth in Waterloo region. These suggestions parallel those made by youth respondents themselves and some cross over into the second category for these policy recommendations as well. The topics they suggested be covered in long-term gatherings of youth included: mental health, self-management skills and overall well-being, Islam, technology, identity, and generally "relevant" youth events, with the last suggestion being contingent on youth leadership running such events themselves. Youth leadership opportunities were mentioned numerous times alongside citing a need for more volunteer opportunities within community and religious organizations. What was meant by 'long-term' was the development of these educational and supportive groups where connections are very personal and do not cut off at the end of singular events. Muslim youth respondents want to be known personally by organizations and groups, not just as anonymous, one-off participants.

Mental and Family Wellness

As mentioned above, some of those supportive initiatives for youth should be directed towards helping them manage their mental health overall, as well as promoting family wellness. In a similar style as the Islam Awareness course, the Muslim Association of Canada has also developed a free Muslim youth mental health online course for educators, parents and youth themselves to learn more and take a more proactive approach. This course was also funded by the Ministry of Education in Ontario. Once this course is launched, it should be supported and used by stakeholder organizations to help address this area of concern.

Beyond psychoeducation such as this, systems navigability would also be an area of support - that is, helping Muslim youth and their families understand how to access mental health support and knowing what to expect when they do. Having Muslim mental health "brokers" available for families to ask and receive assistance from is one suggestion, as is the support of in-mosque, confidential walk-in counseling services. At the advocacy level, stakeholder organizations must be advocating federally and provincially for universal mental health care.

When it comes to both the clear positive impact of a healthy parent-youth relationship and the detrimental impact of either its absence or the absence of nurturing pathways of communication within it, there remains more work to be done. Organizations should support Muslim family counseling, hosting workshops and long-term family support groups to improve communications and should generally offer access to both existing resources as well as the promotion of Islamo-centric ones. According to youth respondents, the majority felt that their parents could benefit from accessing more Islamic parenting resources overall. Having parents better understand youth stresses pertaining to school and life balance, as well as the overall pressures that they face in terms of civilizational friction would be beneficial. In other studies, Muslim parents themselves have noted that they feel like the forgotten demographic among organizations and that more classes or support groups for Islamic parenting are needed - something which fits into the recommendations for this assessment as well. It is also worth noting that supporting parental mental wellness also supports youth and overall family wellness.

Finally, providing anti-Islamophobia training and support to mental health professionals, particularly school counsellors and other frontline workers who may be working with Muslim youth and their families is essential going forward.

Processing the Pandemic

While the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has not been directly addressed in this assessment, its specter does hang over many of the answers given by Muslim youth respondents both implicitly and directly. Additionally, its impact on the mental wellness of youth in Waterloo region more broadly has been noted. Stakeholder organizations would do well to provide spaces in which Muslim youth could properly vocalize and process their shared experiences growing up during the pandemic. Creating a space where youth could be facilitated by a mental health professional to safely discuss the impacts of lockdowns, social isolation, health fears, and so forth may also help Muslim youth feel better understood, less isolated in the impact of these experiences, and move forward together.



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Appendix A: Survey Questions



My Demographics

My Family

My Activities

My Experiences

My Community

*My Peers
and Mentors*

My Health

My Identity

*Additional Questions
(Unnumbered)*

My Islam

My Demographics

- City
- Age
- Please state your gender.
- Do you identify as a Muslim?
- Please state any relevant sect information pertaining to your Muslim identity (sunni, shia, sufi, etc)
Please note that this is for demographic purposes only.
- Were you born Muslim, or did you revert/convert to Islam?
- How would you describe your ethnic origins and/or racial identity? Arab, African, Bi-racial, Black, East or South-East Asian ((Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian, etc.), South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, Bangladeshi, etc.), West Asian (Turkish, Afghan, Iranian, Persian etc.), Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, Inuit), Central or South American, white, other
- What languages do you know fluently? English, French, Arabic, Urdu, Somali, Turkish, Other
- Where were you born?
- How long have you been in Canada?
- What is your immigration status? (Canadian Citizen, Permanent Resident, Student Visa, Work Visa, TFW, Other) Please note if it has changed over time.
- How long have you lived in your current municipality?
- What area/neighbourhood of Waterloo do you reside in?
- What kind of schooling did you attend before post-secondary education? Public schooling, Islamic schooling, Homeschooling, other
- What is the highest level of schooling you have completed? Elementary, Junior High, Some High School, Graduated High School, Some university or post-secondary, Technical school, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree, Post-doc, Other
- What is your current employment status? Student, Self-Employed, Employed part-time, Employed full-time, Temporary/casual, other
- What is/was your occupation or employment?
- How would you describe your or your family's economic class? Lower class, Middle class, upper middle class, upper class, other
- What is your family living status? Homeowners, renters, other
- Please describe your family home/living situation. If you no longer live with your family, please answer for the last living situation you had when you lived with them. (Check all that apply) Parents married, parents divorced, Parents divorced and remarried to others, Single custody, Parents divorced and remarried to others, Shared custody, Parents separated, One parent deceased, Both parents deceased, Legal guardians, Intergenerational family home (lived with parents and grandparents or other family members), other
- Have you ever experienced homelessness? 24. If yes, for how long?
- What is your marital status? Single, engaged, married, divorced, widowed, other.
- Do you have children? If yes, how many children do you have and what are their ages?

My Identity

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I have felt confused about or a conflicted sense of my own identity in the recent past.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I have sometimes felt that my identity “fits in” nowhere fully.
- On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 = never and 5= always), I struggle with balancing my Muslim identity in this Western context.
- On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 = never and 5= always), I have experienced or used “code-switching. (Codeswitching refers to the process of shifting from one linguistic code (a language or dialect) to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting. (Britannica, 2019))
- On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 = never and 5= always), any conflict with my identity makes me feel less able or willing to practice Islam.

My Family

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My parent(s)/guardian(s) don't always understand what matters to me.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My parent(s)/guardian(s) don't always understand me.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I feel a generational difference that can negatively impact my relationship with my parent(s)/guardian(s).
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My relationship with my parent(s)/guardian(s) impacts my own sense of identity.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My parent(s)'/guardian(s)' expectations of me are too high.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My parent(s)'/guardian(s)' expectations of me do not align with my own goals.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), On the whole, I have a positive relationship with my parent(s)/guardian(s).
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My parent(s)/guardian(s) should access more Islamic parenting resources.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My family is willing to help me make decisions.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My family really tries to help me.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I can talk to my family about my problems.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), If applicable, I can talk to my siblings about my problems.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have experienced conflicts with my parent(s)/guardian(s) over school.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have experienced conflicts with my parent(s)/guardian(s) over work.

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have experienced conflicts with my parent(s)/ guardian(s) over my friends.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have experienced conflicts with my parent(s)/ guardian(s) over my interests.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel my family treats me differently than others due to my gender.

My Peers and Mentors

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I have a strong bond with at least one positive role model in my life.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I have a strong bond with at least one mentor in my life.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I feel a strong emotional bond with at least one other person.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I feel that my teacher accepts me as I am.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Our teachers treat us fairly.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I feel a lot of trust in my teachers
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Now or in the recent past my coworkers (have) accept(ed) me for who I am. *Only answer if applicable (ie. you have had coworkers)
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Now or in the recent past, my employer treats me fairly. *Only answer if applicable (ie. you have had an employer)
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Now or in the recent past, my employer accommodates my religious practice, beliefs and needs. *Only answer if applicable (ie. you have had an employer)
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Now or in the recent past, I have felt I can trust my employer. *Only answer if applicable (ie. you have had an employer)
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Now or in the recent past, I have felt I can trust my coworkers. *Only answer if applicable (ie. you have had coworkers)
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I feel I lack close friends.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and wellbeing.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel peer pressure to contradict Islamic beliefs and practices.

My Community

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I am optimistic about the future of acceptance for Muslims in Canada.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), When tragedies or oppression affect Muslims globally, I feel impacted by it.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Any challenges I face are made worse by Muslim community issues.

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Muslim community spaces are welcoming and non-judgmental.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Muslim community spaces are generally safe for me.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My Muslim community center has adequate representation for youth in its leadership.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I can access quality mentorship in my Muslim community.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Mosques are serving their purposes when it comes to youth.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Mosques are inclusive spaces of all races and ethnic backgrounds.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I feel I am a valued member of my community.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I like school.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My school is a nice place to be.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My school rules are fair to me.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I belong at my school.
- On a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1= very unsafe and 4 = very safe), how safe do you feel from crime in your neighbourhood?
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I attend programming in Islamic centres.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I attend programming in cultural community centres.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel welcome in mosques.
- On a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1= very weak and 5 = very strong), how would you describe your sense of belonging to the community?
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel a general sense of belonging in my Muslim community.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel a general sense of belonging in Canada

My Health

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Watching negative news about Muslims impacts my mental wellness.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), My physical health and wellbeing is good.
- Check all that apply: I have experienced the following physical symptoms anywhere from once per week to everyday in the past 2 years: Nervousness, Difficulties sleeping (getting and/or staying asleep, lack of restful sleep), Feeling low or depressed, Irritability in mood or bad temper, Other
- On a scale of 1 to 6 (where 1= never and 6 = everyday), in the past month, how often did you feel good about managing the responsibilities of your daily life?
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I have control over issues that matter to me

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I have total control over my own life.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I have a personal connection to the natural environment.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I feel I have a personal responsibility to help protect the natural environment.
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1= very dissatisfied and 10 = very satisfied), how satisfied are you with your life in general?
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Accessing mental health support is difficult because my family doesn't accept it.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), Accessing mental health support is difficult financially.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have experienced challenges with my mental health. (Anxiety, depression etc)
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel stressed or distressed.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have felt sad or hopeless for more than several days in a row.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel lonely.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel isolated from others in my community.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel left out.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I don't have enough time to socialize with my friends.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I feel that I am part of a group of people who share my beliefs and attitudes.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have used drugs and/or alcohol to cope with stress or "have fun."
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have self-harmed.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have contemplated suicide.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have attempted suicide.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I have gone to bed hungry.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), My family cannot afford quality meals.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5 = always), I don't have enough to eat.
- Yes or No: I have accessed mental health support in the past or currently.
- Check all that apply: I have access mental health support from the following sources: School counselor, family doctor, imam, social worker, public counselor, psychotherapist, psychiatrist, medication, mindfulness practices, hospital, not applicable, other
- If you have accessed mental health support, please describe your experience(s)
- Yes or No: I have been diagnosed with a mood disorder.
- Yes or No: I have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.
- Yes or No: I have received another mental health diagnosis. If yes, please specify the diagnosis.
- The average number of hours I sleep per day, including naps:
- The average number of hours I do light exercise (walking, cleaning, yoga etc) per week:
- The average number of hours I do vigorous exercise (running, team sports, aerobics, weight lifting etc.) per week

My Experiences

- Yes or No: I have experienced discrimination as a Muslim in my school.
- Yes or No: If applicable, I have experienced discrimination as a Muslim at my work.
- Yes or No: I have experienced harassment, threats, or violence for being a Muslim.
- Yes or No: I have witnessed my family members experiencing Islamophobia.
- Yes or No: I have witnessed my friends experiencing Islamophobia.
- If you answered "yes" to any of the above 5 questions, please describe your experiences.
- Yes or No: I have experienced negativity, judgment, or hostility in Muslim community spaces.
- Yes or No: I have experienced discrimination due to my race or ethnicity in Muslim community spaces.
- Yes or No: I have experienced discrimination due to my gender in Muslim community spaces.
- Yes or No: I have experienced discrimination due to my economic class in Muslim community spaces.
- If you answered "yes" to any of the above 4 questions, please describe your experiences.
- Yes or No: I have been involved with gang activity in the past.
- Yes or No: I know other Muslims who have been involved with gang activity.
- If you have answered "yes" to either of the above 2 questions, please describe your experience(s).
- Yes or No: I have experienced bullying at least once in the past two to three months.
- Yes or No: I have experienced bullying at some point in my life.
- If you answered "yes" to either of the above 2 questions, please describe your experiences.
- Yes or No: My family has had experiences with Children's Aid Society.
- If you answered "yes" to the above question, please describe your experiences.

My Activities

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5= always), I have participated in local events in support of a charitable organization.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1= never and 5= always), I have participated in a public protest or demonstration.
- Yes or No: I voted in the last election.
- Yes or No: I have written a letter, email or spoken to an elected official about an issue that matters to me.
- Yes or No: I wrote a letter to the editor in the newspaper about an issue that matters to me.
- Please check all that apply: I attend the following extracurricular activities: community sports teams, school sports teams, mosque or community centre religious learning activities, general mosque activities, art groups, other
- Outside of school/work, I spend an average of hours outside per week.
- Including school and work, I spend an average of hours per day on devices (phone, tablet, computer).
- Daily hours spent playing computer or video games.
- Daily hours spent searching the internet.
- Daily hours spent using social media to connect with friends and family.
- Daily hours spent watching TV, live streams, and/or online movies/shows.

My Islam:

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), being Muslim means I will always be a “stranger” or different in non-Muslim societies.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), I expect to be treated differently as a Muslim because of our religion.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = never and 5 = always), The challenges I experience have negatively impacted my relationship with Allah.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = never and 5 = always), The challenges I experience have positively impacted my relationship with Allah.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = never and 5 = always), I feel pressure to be an “ambassador” or representative of Islam to others.
- Yes or no: I have doubts about Islam because of my experiences.
- Yes or no: I have considered leaving Islam recently or in the past.
- If you answered “yes” to either of the above 2 questions, please describe your experiences.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = never and 5 = always), I feel strongly connected to my Muslim identity.
- On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 = never and 5 = always), I am proud to be a Muslim.
- Check all activities you have practiced regularly in the past year: Five daily prayers, Extra prayers (nawafil), Fasting Ramadan, Extra fasting (nawafil), Daily adhkar (dhikr), daily duaa, reading Qur’an, attending Friday prayers in congregation, other.

Additional Questions (Unnumbered)

- All things considered, what has had the biggest impact on your well-being over the past year?
- What suggestions do you have about how community organizations can improve well-being in our community?
- Is there anything else you would like the researcher for this study to know?
- Would you be interested in participating in a small focus group interview as another part of this study?



ABOUT THE RESEARCH PARTNER: The Institute for Religious and Socio-Political Studies (I-RSS) uses interdisciplinary academic research to actively shape and contribute to the discourse about Muslims and Islam in North America, especially Canada. As a non-profit research institute, the I-RSS mission is to produce original and relevant research, filling the gaps in North American academic policy circles. I-RSS does this by creating much-needed space for research, outreach, advocacy, and discussion. I-RSS believes in the practical application of research findings, producing policy analyses and providing recommendations on issues concerning Muslims to Islamic organizations. I-RSS research also informs all levels of government for better engagement with North American Muslims. Visit i-rss.org for more information.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Nakita Valerio is an award-winning writer, researcher, and Muslim community organizer based on Treaty 6 territory, Amiskwacîwâskahikan (Edmonton, Canada). She currently serves as the Research Director for the Institute for Religious and Socio-Political Studies (I-RSS), as well as the Editor-in-Chief for the RSS Journal, as an editor for Edmonton Heritage Council's ECAMP project and as a research fellow for the Chester Ronning Center for the Study of Religion and Public Life at the University of Alberta. She is a graduate in history and Islamic-Jewish studies from the University of Alberta and has been a research fellow with the Tessellate Institute, I-RSS, the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities (ECMC), Mercy Mission Canada (MMC), and Coalition of Muslim Women-KW. Nakita also acts as an academic strategist/mentor for graduate students in the disciplines of history, religious studies, sociology, and social work. She serves as an advisor for the Ronning Center and as the Faculty of Arts representative for the University of Alberta Alumni Council. Nakita is the sponsor of the Fatima Al-Fihri Graduate Award in Islamic Studies and is the recipient of the University of Alberta's Alumni Horizon Award in 2018. She co-founded a primary school in Morocco and is currently writing a novel.





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