

Talk to Manchester University Press (Publishing House)

BARRIERS TO MEDIA PARTICIPATION

1. Lack of Muslim journalists:

- **First generation** Muslim parents never really wanted **their kids** to be journalists.
- Media is a major player in the portrayal of Muslims and its importance in the chain of Islamophobia. But there are only a **handful of Muslim media personalities**.
- Currently, **0.4% of journalists are Muslim** when the population of Muslims in the UK is closer to **4.8%**. Muslim journalists are likely to improve coverage and reduce the likelihood of misreporting about Islam and Muslims.

2. Lack of opportunity in the media sector:

- Muslims face a paradox in the media. They find it **hard to find publications that will take their stories** (70% of UK print press is right-wing, Mail, Sun, Telegraph etc), and yet at the same time, the media will rush to find Muslims to speak about specific topics.
- Muslim journalists are asked by editors to comment on the **politics of Muslim majority countries**, reducing their individuality and voices. This often means Muslim journalists focus less on Domestic affairs.

3. Islamophobia in mainstream media

- There is no doubt that **Islamophobia in the mainstream media** has **deterred Muslims** from the field and has created barriers for them as well as a relationship of mistrust. For years the media has capitalised from **clickbait Islamophobia**.
- From **“Muslims ‘silent on terror’”** to **“Muslim sex grooming”** headlines, newspapers regularly associate Muslims and Islam, rather than the individuals in question, with criminality and extremism.
- Therefore, considering the frequent negative bias of media and broadcasting outlets regarding certain groups and perception of religious illiteracy across journalistic circles, it is not uncommon to find minority communities to be wary to engage with journalists.
- Anjum Chaudhry, **speed dial** journalists

ADDRESSING ISLAMOPHOBIA

A. *Holding media to account:*

Press regulatory bodies must ensure that reliable and honest news is being delivered to the public. Should they breach the regulations, the following actions must be taken:

- Ineffective Press Regulator system. Judge Jury and Executioner. Royal Charter not properly implemented, especially financial penalties element. Only rich can challenge press.
- Challenge journalists and editors
- Complain to relevant bodies such as IPSO (not-Independent) or OFCOM
- Contact third-party organisations to proceed with complaint – MEND etc

B. **Inclusive reporting** means misrepresentation of Muslims can be avoided. This can be done by:

- **Enlarging** and diversifying the **images** in archives and raise awareness among editors about additional captions. Covid crisis, Pakistan flight...
- Avoiding **generalisations**. For example, recognise **Muslim women's choices** and their willingness to achieve the same rights as their fellow citizens
- Questioning **stigmatising statements** by pointing out when they convey inaccurate and stereotyped images.
- Avoiding the **categorisation of minorities** as well as qualifying that an opinion maybe based on individual's personal beliefs; fostering knowledge
- about diversity; **giving voice to stakeholders** such as MEND

C. *Religious literacy*:

Unconscious bias training does is **not do enough** to address Islamophobia.

Religious literacy requires not only an understanding of the **basic tenants of a religion**, but also an understanding of socio-cultural, political, and historical dynamics, acquiring religious literacy clearly requires learning about forces that have shaped our society.

Within media and broadcast, religious literacy means:

- To improve levels of **diversity in the workforce** to ensure fair and accurate information is being relayed
- To building **relationships with communities** allows journalists
- to build trust, explore differing perspectives, and expand their own knowledge of important issues
- **Diversity and inclusion training**: These training courses can be generalised to cover all protected characteristics, or they can be bespoke, such as that provided by MEND which can be tailored to specifically focus on British Muslims as a case study.
- **External expert training and educational resources**: There are a variety of third party organisations, such as MEND, that provide specialised and bespoke expert training and resources designed to equip journalists to understand the issues affecting religious communities

D. *Encourage religious literacy within press.*

- **Journalists**: As previously mentioned, there are certain valuable methods that journalists may utilise to increase their own religious literacy, in particular

community engagement, undertaking diversity and inclusion training, and participating in specialised expert training.

- **Publishers:** As discussed above, there are tangible programs that publishers can adopt in order to encourage religious literacy. Particular attention should be paid to increasing the diversity of staff, including at senior levels. This should include positive action and engaging in initiatives that are designed to attract talent from BAME and religious communities.
- **Broadcasters** should also engage and consult with mainstream Muslim groups such as MEND and MCB in order to ensure broadcast media approaches religion with sensitivity and accuracy. These organisations can provide vital insights into issues relating to Islam and Muslims, thus assisting broadcasters to approach projects with sensitivity and understanding.
- Without a **regulator that is capable of holding publishers to account**, there is little scope for successfully curbing the stereotyping and sensationalising stories pursued by newspaper publishers. It is, therefore, imperative that policymakers commit to the full implementation of the Royal Charter on press regulation and commit to the commencement of the second part of the Leveson Inquiry, including an investigation into the prevalence of Islamophobia within.

CAGE Book

- Last year, Manchester University Press evidenced all of the afore-mentioned since its publication of “I Refuse to Condemn,” edited by the research director for CAGE, Asim Qureshi, despite heavy pressure not to.
- Britain’s counter-extremism commissioner, Sara Khan, criticised the publisher and said its publication of the book gave legitimacy to a group that supported convicted terrorists and provided platforms for “Al-Qaeda ideologues.”
- But a spokesman for Manchester University Press said the book was not a defence of violent criminals but an “examination of society’s expectations around an ‘appropriate’ response from innocent people of colour unconnected with extremists except for similarities of race or religion.”