ENGAGING MUSLIM WOMEN: ISSUES AND NEEDS

Dr. Daood Hamdani

CCMW
Canadian Council of Muslim Women

Engaging Muslim Women: Issues and Needs

DR. DAOOD HAMDANI

© Canadian Council of Muslim Women
Toronto, Canada
October 2006
www.ccmw.com

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to many people for their help and encouragement. The National Board of Directors of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) provided advice and guidance at every stage, from the development of the idea to the completion of the report. In particular, I am grateful to Alia Hogben, executive director of the Council, who kept the project on track and Nuzhat Jafri, director in charge of this project, for her extensive and insightful comments. Salima Ebrahim, a board member, reviewed an earlier draft and made very useful suggestions and comments. Eman Ahmed, projects co-ordinator at the Council, ensured that every thing fell in place properly, and her detailed summary of focus group discussions was a useful source of information for this report.

As the news about this project spread, many women wrote to offer help and insights from their expertise and field work. Hundreds of them, from St. John's to Victoria, spared time to complete the questionnaire on-line. Many who did not have access to the Internet completed a paper copy. Others agreed to interviews in person or by telephone. More than one hundred women gathered on the weekends in six cities across the country to share their thoughts in focus group discussions. This project would not have been possible without their enthusiastic co-operation.

I had the privilege of being the only male presence in one focus group. The participants included teenagers and grandmothers, clerks and senior executives, school drop-outs and doctorate holders. In spite of my three decades of studying and chronicling the Muslim community I was struck by the new perspectives they brought to the discussion. All of them will see their mark on this report. Muslim organizations that exclude women under one pretext or another have deprived themselves of a unique perspective, which is essential in the task of community building.

I benefited from the expertise and encouragement of a few good men too. Faisel Saeed designed an excellent and user-friendly system for the on-line survey. My friend, Abdulkadir Musa, was always there when I needed his technical expertise. Jodey Michael Derouin of the Department of Canadian Heritage provided encouragement at all stages of this project.

Finally, this project could not be undertaken without the financial help of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The views expressed in this report are mine; they are not necessarily shared by the Canadian Council of Muslim Women or other people who were involved in the preparation and interpretation of the material.

Daood Hamdani
October 2006

Ottawa, Canada
hamdani@sympatico.ca

Executive Summary

This report deals with challenges facing Muslim women in the process of integration and identifies needs in order to help in planning and designing programs. Integration has many facets. The focus here is on three aspects: political participation, economic integration and social engagement.

It is based on the findings of the Muslim Women's Needs Survey – first of its kind in North America and Europe – conducted in the fall of 2005, and supplemented by focus group discussions held in cities across the country. It also incorporates insights obtained from the previous CCMW (Canadian Council of Muslim Women) studies.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Muslim women are disengaged from the political process at all the three levels of government. In spite of an intense effort by Muslim organizations to mobilize the community the Muslim female turnout at the polls was only 42% in the 2004 federal election, only slightly higher than the estimated 39% in 2000 and well below the national average. Voter turnout rates are low across age groups, and compared to other faith communities, Muslims are the least active. Strangely, however, a majority thinks that voting is a constructive way to strengthen the voice of the community.

Recent immigrants, who arrived in the 1990s, are less engaged in the electoral process. They are not very familiar with the processes and institutions. Moreover, as they are occupied with earning a livelihood and establishing themselves in their professions, participating in the electoral process is not a priority. Proportionately many more recent immigrants as compared with their older counterparts see voting as a choice, and there has to be some justification to vote.

Muslim women are engaged in a variety of other civic activities. Signing petitions tops the list, followed by participation in rallies. The Survey did not inquire about the nature of the petitions, but some writers contend that those pertaining to the observance of religious rites and rituals draw a more enthusiastic response than those dealing with social and political issues. Nonetheless, it indicates an awareness of the importance of expressing one's opinion in order to be counted, which needs to be extended to democratic participation. Only about 5% reported writing a letter to or an op-ed in a newspaper, and fewer than that appeared on the radio or TV.

The reference period of the Survey could have influenced the results as it coincided with the intense debate on Muslim family tribunals, in which positions were drawn, by and large, along the gender line. In addition, pictures of the horrific treatment of Muslim prisoners in Abu Gharaib were still a hot issue as were stories of the desecration of the Qur'an by the American guards.

Political parties serve as a bridge between government and society but membership of political parties is not much in demand among Canadians; it is less popular among visible minorities and Muslim females are further behind. Only 5% of the visible minorities reported belonging to a political party in 2003, while 2% of the respondents to the Muslim Women's Needs Survey had a party membership. The effect of disinterest in party politics is reflected in the small number of Muslim women getting party nominations to contest elections. Only four were supported by a major party in the 2004 federal election – the highest number ever, including the 2006 federal election – and out of the four one was elected.

Barriers to electoral participation are numerous and include lack of financial independence, attitudes brought from native countries where electoral processes are non-existent or occasionally staged, resistance by family and friends and concern about the reaction of the conservative clergy quick to pronounce judgement. Stereotyping of gender roles and double standards in the way a woman in public life is treated in Canada

reinforce them. Muslims and women, in particular, face additional problems: about 30% of the Canadians polled said that they would be reluctant to vote for a political party led by a Muslim.

The findings of the Muslim Women's Needs Survey revealed that existing Muslim community programs and activities were not serving women well, because of the way they were delivered. Most of the mosques, which served as the centres of activity, are not women-friendly, and on-line delivery of information left out those who are not proficient in English or French, do not have an Internet connection or do not know how to use it.

The principal reason why Muslim females are disengaged from the political process has little to do with attitudes. It is related to personal or administrative factors. More than two in five non-voters were in this category. If these factors could be overcome, the largest segments of non-voters would ideally be expected to vote, boosting the Muslim female voter turnout rate from 42% to just over 60%.

Apathy or lack of interest is the second main factor. Women in this group are politically aware and committed. They realize the importance of participatory democracy; however, they are disillusioned with politicians because they do not raise issues that are of concern to them. Active role by Muslim organizations in organizing town hall meetings and raising their issues will help to attract this group of non-voters.

Only about 10% can be described as hard core non-voters who have negative opinions of politicians and political institutions or think that voting in a secular democracy is not consistent with their religious beliefs.

A multi-pronged strategy with the core objectives of raising awareness, educating the community and making the process more accessible is needed. Enabling mechanisms are required to fulfill these needs, and new channels of delivery must be explored.

Access to the process can be improved in a number of ways. Voter registration calls for special attention. Three groups should be targeted, which together account for one in three eligible voters:

- Those who are entering the electorate for the first time as they reach the voting age. About 10% of total Muslim females eligible to vote in the next election will be eligible for the first time. Another 10% became eligible in the last election but many of them are estimated to have abstained. It means that one in five Muslim female voters in the next federal election will be new to the process. They have to be reminded that they have attained the voting age.
- Those whose address changes often. Muslim females are young (median age 26 years) and hence very mobile as they relocate to attend university, take up a job or form a family. By the next election, one in ten will have moved to a new address.
- Those who speak neither English nor French, irrespective of the age. They are about 10% of the female population. They need to be informed in a language they understand best.

The Muslim electorate is spread across all but a few federal ridings. In order to leverage resources, it is important to identify ridings with heavy concentration of young Muslim females and of recent immigrants who speak neither of the official languages and concentrate effort on those constituencies.

It is equally important to raise awareness both within the community and among community leaders of the low level of political participation. Shaking up this sense of complacency is critical, and it is important that the challenge of participation is embraced with some enthusiasm.

Among the strategic needs, educate and inform eligible females about the electoral process and their right and responsibility to vote. New program delivery channels must be explored such as brochures or video presentations in collaboration with social service agencies who are the closest point of contact with some of the target groups; public service announcements in heritage languages on community TV and radio programs about why democracy is important and why it is important to vote; and involving women-friendly Islamic centres

to promote the material and enlightened clergy to orient their sermons towards this type of education. Student associations on university and college campuses should not be overlooked.

In so many other areas of professional achievement, the gender gap has been narrowing, but not in politics. Some people argued that the progress towards equality in higher ranks in law, medicine, and academia, professions usually regarded as the gateways to politics, would spill into politics but it does not seem to be happening. In the current parliament, only 20% of the representatives are women, and Canada ranks 45th in the world in terms of female representation in national legislatures.

It may be time to think of introducing ideas similar to employment equity into politics which would see political parties requiring riding associations to exercise due diligence in recruiting visible minority female candidates, especially in ridings where they have significant presence. Campaign teams of political parties should reflect the electoral make-up. A coalition of women's organizations needs to be formed around this issue.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

A vast majority of Muslim females depends on the labour market for their livelihood. But in spite of the fact that Muslim women are highly educated and specialize in the leading edge technologies, entry into the job market is not easy. Among faith communities of similar size, Muslim women have the highest unemployment rate although they are the second most highly educated group.

There is an obvious disconnect when so many university graduates in mathematics, engineering, applied sciences, and biotechnologies with proficiency in both official languages are unemployed or underemployed in the midst of shortages. The employment equity program has made progress but visible minorities and, by implication, Muslim females are still under-represented overall and in executive ranks.

High levels of unemployment and the high incidence of underemployment have also an adverse effect on their income, which lags well behind the average for all females in the country. Other findings include:

- The position of Muslim women has deteriorated relative to all women. Muslim women who migrated in the 1960s are doing better than their non-Muslim counterparts who immigrated at the same time. After the 1960s, however, their position has consistently worsened. A Muslim female who immigrated in the 1990s has only half as much chance to be in a well-paying job (over $60,000) as another female immigrant of the same era. She is about 20% more likely than another immigrant to be earning less than $20,000.
- According to the conventional wisdom, each successive generation of the descendents of new settlers does economically better than the previous one, because they are a better job fit and organizational fit than their immigrant mothers. However, Muslim females born in Canada did not do as well as their immigrant mothers. They were also worse off, as compared with all Canadian-born females.
- Nearly one in three Muslim women live in households with income below the low-income cut-off (LICO), i.e. their income level is such that more than one-half of it is taken up by the necessities. This is slightly higher than 29% for the visible minority females.
- Some Muslim seniors work past the retirement age. Some of them arrived in Canada later in life and have meager pension incomes. Others did not collect enough pension credits because they moved from one job to another in search of a career and their pension credits were not portable. There are others who go to work to support their grown-up children who do not earn enough.

Respondents to the Muslim Women's Needs Survey identified the following as the top five barriers to employment:

- Language proficiency was one of the two top barriers.

- Raising educational requirements by the employer was the number two top barrier.
- The lack of recognition of international credentials.
- Respondents felt that discrimination hindered their job prospects, but they appeared divided on its cause. Although the majority attributed it to race and ethnicity religious discrimination also ranked high as a barrier.
- Canadian work experience.

In addition to affirmative action and employment equity programs, there is a need to affirm diversity. The profile of the marketplace for labour – where the workers will come from – and for goods – into which businesses sell their products – is changing. It is forecast that by 2011, immigration will account for all of the country's labour force growth and by 2026, for all of Canada's population growth. Canadian labour force and marketplace will have more and more visible minorities, in particular Muslim females. Statistics Canada projects that in ten years from now, Muslim Canadians will form over 4% of the country's population, which is more than double their share in 2001.

In a country seeking competitive advantage in a global economy, the goal of managing diversity is to develop our capacity to accept, incorporate and empower the diverse human talents of the most diverse nation on earth. It is our reality. It must become our strength. Companies that wait for diverse people to meld into a homogeneous, monolithic culture will not be around to take advantage of the enormous opportunities that will arise – and are already arising – from diversity.

Muslim community organizations need to present to business and employee referral agencies the side of Muslim female workers that is not easy for small and medium sized businesses to see. It is important to convey to them that they will benefit from understanding international credentials and work force planning that emphasizes the quality of their abilities:

- Muslim female workers may not have the Canadian work experience but their track record of performance in another country will likely be repeated in Canada;
- Their multi-linguistic proficiency is a source of competitive advantage in emerging local markets and growing international markets;
- They may not be very conversant with the 'Canadian way', but their different cultural perspectives are source of new ideas, new products, and new ways of doing things;
- Highly educated Muslim females with multi-linguistic proficiency and their knowledge of various cultures are critical competencies in building international networks and understanding buyers in the exporters' markets.

Produce brochures and videos to communicate that a Canadian Muslim woman is no different from others in promoting the interests of her employer, by:

- Bringing Canadian employers face to face with their stereotype of Muslim women;
- Documenting cases where Muslim women have risen to positions of leadership in community service, business, sports, public life, etc;
- Making documentaries of these women showing a day in their work life – conducting meetings, dealing with colleagues, negotiating on behalf of their employer, and so on.
- Encouraging Muslim or other workers to write stories in company newsletters about Muslim employees who have made contributions within the company or the community.

In order to help Muslim women in their job search:

1. Set up or facilitate networking through local chapters, using the model employed by business schools: business and social gatherings. Invite officials of companies, one at a time, to talk about their organization or an important business issue. Start with companies doing business in Muslim countries;
2. Involve Muslim women – and men – who have risen to senior position in guiding women looking for jobs;

3. Start mentorship programs with prominent Muslims and others who understand their difficulties.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Muslim women face many challenges. Some of them are unique while others are common with all women. Like all women, they experience gender bias; as a visible minority, they are exposed to ethnic discrimination; and being Muslim further compounds the difficulty. At home, they struggle to forge new housework-sharing arrangements with their spouse; at the workplace, they try to mediate between the demands of their careers and care of their family. They try to deal with all this without any cultural and social support systems of their community, and the only well established institution, the mosque, limits access to them. How are they getting along?

Muslim females – and males – are the main target of unfair treatment in the country:

- About 44% of the respondents to the Muslim Women's Needs Survey said that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in the last five years;
- Four years after the burst of hate crimes and discrimination in the wake of September 2001 and numerous outreach initiatives taken by Muslims, a large number of Canadians think that discrimination against Muslims (males and females) is rising;
- The rise in anti-Muslim sentiment is in sharp contrast to the general decline or no change in racism or discrimination against minorities. While only 11% saw discrimination against minorities as more of a problem than before, four times as many observed that anti-Muslim sentiment was on the rise;
- Opinion polls indicate that while Canadians are at ease working with a Muslim female or male supervisor at work, having Muslims teach their children at school, or having a Muslim daughter- or son-in-law, a non-Muslim would be preferable; and
- Finally, the aftermath of 9/11 had a big impact on crime against Muslims. Hate offences targeting them jumped. More than two-thirds of the rise in crimes motivated by religious hatred reported by Toronto police in 2001 was directed against Muslims.

In spite of the negative experiences, Muslim women's conviction that core values, embodied in the Charter and expressed in the multicultural policy, will prevail is firm. Findings of the Muslim Women's Needs Survey affirm their attachment to the country, and show that this bond is stronger than the ties to their community and the country of origin.

Respondents to the Survey further indicated a strong preference for a Canadian Muslim identity. An overwhelming majority said that they would like their children to grow up as Canadians blending their parents' heritage with their Canadian culture instead of clinging on to their parents' identity, rebuking the detractors of multiculturalism and the small minority of Muslim proponents of the 'cloister model'. A national survey found that a larger percentage of Muslims expressed a strong sense of belonging to the country than the national average.

There is a serious lack of social capital to ease integration. This is obvious in the low levels of social activities observed in the Survey. One in three Muslim women reported being a member of an organization or participating in group activities, which is half the activity level of all Canadians. Among faith communities, they rank the lowest.

According to the Survey, taking part in gatherings of a religious nature is the most common type of activity. While this reflects a strong attachment to the religion, it also suggests a serious lack of involvement in other institutions and activities of a social, cultural or recreational nature.

Participation in ethnic organizations plays an important part in their socialization. These organizations are important in the preservation of identity in the early stages of the settlement process, as they also serve as venues for religious occasions. Such facilities rarely became established as permanent facilities in the Muslim community.

As the mosque is mainly a male institution in Canada, access to women is limited. Their effective exclusion is slowly beginning to attract criticism from within the community, but the demographics of the congregants indicate that the change will be very slow.

Social networks are essential to a smooth integration of a community. For newcomers into the society, opportunities for networking are limited. Opportunities that exist mainly come through the ethnic, religious, cultural and community organizations.

A majority of Muslim women depends on other Muslims for emotional support and friendship. Close to 16% said that they had no non-Muslim friends, and 38% reported that most of their friends were Muslim. About one-quarter maintained a balance, and for one-fifth of the respondents the circle of friends was primarily non-Muslims.

Young women in school or university are more likely to have a wider circle of friends. Similarly, those living in smaller cities are more likely to have more friends of different denominations than those in larger cities.

The Survey tried to capture a sense of their involvement in their neighbourhoods. Just over 10% of the respondents said that they knew most of their neighbours. Close to one-third claimed to know many of them. The majority, however, knew a few of the people living in their neighbourhood, while 4% were secluded.

There are three main areas in which the action is needed to increase the social engagement of Muslim women:

- Improving the quality of information. Set up a database to compile information on incidents of unfair treatment and hate crimes consistent with definitions in the Charter and those used by government agencies to supplement official data and help government agencies to interpret it. It is well known that official data understate incidences of crime against women. Muslim females are less likely to report crime to police.
- Re-brand the community. New packaging is needed. Produce brochures and short videos that emphasize values and things that are dear to all Canadians such as quality of life, multiculturalism and the beauty of the landscape. Show how Muslim women contribute to Canada and uphold these values as artists, teachers, public servants, community builders; pioneer Muslim women who helped build the nation before the Confederation, and others.
- Involve mosques and Islamic centres in the task of community building. It will not be easy but needs to be done. Building mosques is the only investment the community has made for its future. Start with a women-friendly mosque and enlist the help of 'women-friendly male' members of the community.

1. Introduction

The objective of this report is to identify issues and needs of the Muslim women for the purpose of facilitating their integration into the broader society. It is intended to provide analysis that will inform strategic planning, design and delivery of programs and services. As integration is a broad subject, the focus of this report is on aspects directly concerned with the integration of Muslim women into a pluralist society, specifically the degree of their involvement in the democratic process, the workplace and their neighbourhoods.

Quality of a nation's life depends upon the degree to which all communities and segments of the population feel a sense of belonging. It is one of the three most cherished attributes of Canadian life.[1] In the increasingly interdependent world, brought together by movements of people between countries for business, pleasure and settlement, no community and no society can live in a romanticized past. Newcomers adapt to the new environment and, in the process, also influence it. Therefore, a vibrant culture is a constantly changing norm in which all members of the society – newcomers and the established citizens – participate. Change is inevitable. It is already happening.[2] The challenge of leadership is to make it smoother and faster.

Muslim women face many challenges in the process of integration – some arising from within the community and some presented by the broader society. Some of the challenges are common to all women; others are unique to them. They encounter unfair treatment because of their gender. As a visible minority, they are targets for ethnic and racial discrimination, and being Muslim compounds it all. In the labour market, their qualifications and specializations in leading edge technologies are often overlooked and undervalued. At home, they struggle to negotiate new housework-sharing arrangements with their spouses, often imposed on them by the need to supplement family income; at the workplace, they try to mediate between the demands of their professional careers and care of their family. In their neighbourhoods, they are the face of the family and are expected to project the image of their community. They try to deal with all of this without the support of any cultural and social support systems of their own community; indeed, the only well established Muslim institution, the mosque, limits access to them either as a deliberate management decision or by crowding them out. How big is the challenge, how are they coping and what needs to be done?

The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) has been engaged in the task of facilitating the integration of Muslim women for nearly quarter of a century, longer than any other Muslim organization. Recently, it initiated a systematic review of the challenges and opportunities they face. Hard data were compiled from government and other reliable sources, a groundbreaking survey – the first of its kind in North America and Europe – was conducted, and consultations were held with the communities across the country to get inputs of women working in the field, of scholars studying the issue, and of women coping with the

[1] A 2003 survey asked respondents about the persons or things which made them proud as Canadians. They ranked the quality of life only after the beauty of the country's landscape. Multiculturalism was next. www.queens.ca/cora/

[2] See Daood Hamdani, "Islam, Diversity and the Global Village", in *Islam and Diversity: Bridging the Gap*, a report submitted by WEBB International to the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2004; "Islam and Pluralism: A Canadian Perspective", in *Hamdard Islamicus*, July-September, 2005, Karachi, Pakistan; and "The Ummah in Canada: Our Roots, Our Future", *keynote address at the Milad-un-Nabi celebration, Calgary, Alberta, April 2006.*

change in their daily lives. Some of the findings were released in three pioneering studies in 2004 and 2005.[3]

The present report is based on the findings of the Muslim Women's Needs Survey, conducted in the fall of 2005, and builds upon insights gained from other studies done on behalf of CCMW. As well as filling some of the important gaps in our knowledge, this report articulates issues facing Muslim women in the process of integration. It also identifies needs for action to help in establishing priorities and designing programs so that the limited resources of the community can be leveraged to optimize outcomes.

[3] Daood Hamdani, *Muslim Women: Beyond the Perceptions,* November 2004; *Muslim Women: From Polling Booths to Parliament,* March 2005; and *Triple Jeopardy: Muslim Women's Experience of Discrimination,* March 2005. These reports are available from www.ccmw.com.

2. Disengaged from the political process

Involvement of a community in the political and electoral process is an important indicator of its integration in the broader society as it reflects its sense of belonging, relevance of political and democratic institutions to its life and how government relates to it. The decline of electoral participation of Canadians has lately become the subject of intense discussion among politicians, and the academics have also become involved in studying this phenomenon. The analysis has focused on the role of socio-cultural factors in an individual's decision to vote or abstain but differences across faith communities have remained largely unexplored. In particular, little more than anecdotal information has been available about the Muslims' participation, until recently.

A review of the available information reveals that Muslim females are disengaged from the political process at all the three levels of government, and community efforts to get involved in the 2004 federal election had only a slight impact on their participation. Strangely, however, a big majority feels that voting is a constructive way of strengthening the voice of their community, and it is so important that it does not need to be justified on instrumental grounds such as it is a religious duty and candidates are good.

But voting is not the only form of political participation. Citizens can also influence public policy by volunteering for a political party, speaking out on issues of concern to them or running for office if they want to be part of the decision making authority. Muslim women's involvement in main activities is discussed below.

2.1. VOTER TURNOUT RATES ARE LOW AMONG MUSLIM FEMALES

In 2003, a poll taken by the CCMW confirmed for the first time what observers of the community's evolution had suspected: Muslims in general and women in particular are not very active in the democratic process and civic life and lack representation on public boards, commissions and consultative and advisory committees. A more methodical study of the subject corroborated these findings and estimated that only 39% of the eligible Muslim females voted in the 2000 federal election. Their participation in the provincial and municipal elections was even lower.[4]

The Muslim Women's Needs Survey, conducted in the fall of 2005, has provided further – and disconcerting – evidence. In spite of an intense effort by Muslim organizations to mobilize the community, the Muslim female turnout at the 2004 polls improved only slightly and, at 42%, was well below the national average.[5]

In view of the concern about the democratic deficit and the need to integrate all segments of the population into the broader society, disengagement of Muslim women presents a challenge. The low participation level, in itself, is enough to invite action to involve them. The fact that the Muslim community is projected to grow at a faster pace than any other non-Christian faith group in the next ten years[6] gives it more urgency. By the middle of the next decade, Muslim population is projected to equal the combined total of the Jews, Hindus and Sikhs, reaching 4.1% of the total population by 2017, more than double the 2001 share.

2.1.1. Muslims are less likely to vote than other communities

The low level of participation is not the only factor distinguishing the Muslim electorate. When we deconstructed the voter turnout and analyzed the parts, more revealing differences emerged, suggesting that specific measures will be needed to increase their engagement instead of applying a general prescription.

[4] Hamdani, *Muslim Women: From Polling Booths to Parliament*. op. cit.

[5] The overall voter turnout rates of all Canadians in the 2000 and 2004 federal elections were 64.1% and 61.2% respectively.

[6] Statistics Canada, *Population Projections of Visible Minorities, 2001-2017*, Catalogue no. 91-547-XIE, 2005.

Muslim females are not only less likely to vote than women in general, but their participation is also significantly lower as compared to other faith communities. Muslims (male and female) are 26% less likely to vote than Jews. Resources and organization can explain much of this gap, but differences with respect to other communities, which do not have similar advantages over them, must point to other factors as well. For example, they trail the Hindus by 19% and the Sikhs by a similar, though slightly smaller margin (Chart 1). Gender-based figures were not readily available but they are not likely to affect the conclusion.

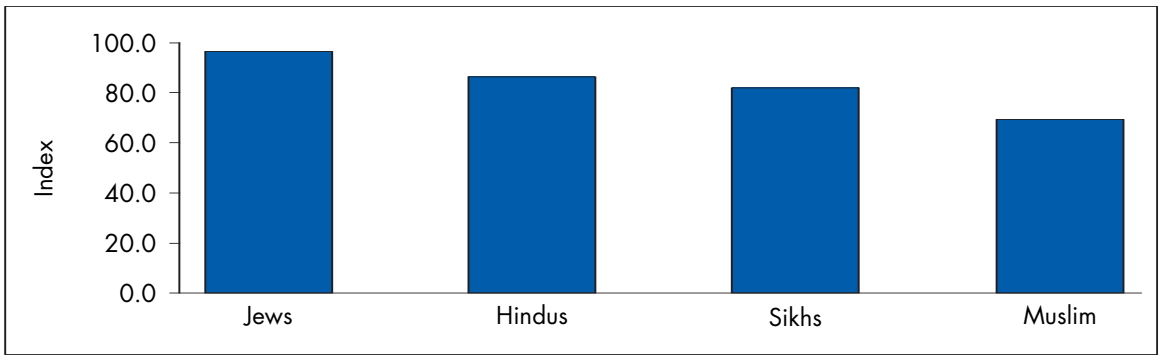
The decision to vote or abstain is influenced by many factors, including education, income, interest in politics, culture, exposure to and attitudes towards democratic processes, social capital, etc. Precise reasons as to why some communities or age cohorts have a greater propensity to vote than others continue to be argued but it is easier to rule out some factors. Demographic structure and differences in exposure to electoral processes do not explain why fewer Muslims vote than the Hindus. Their age profiles, exposure to the Canadian system and institutions and, to a lesser extent, experience with democratic processes in the native countries are similar. The reasons must be sought elsewhere.

2.1.2. Age matters but length of stay in Canada more important

There are other distinct features as well. Studies of the Canadian electorate show that each successive group of people reaching the qualifying age of 18 years is less likely to vote than the same age cohort preceding it.[7] This does not hold for Muslim females because their eligibility to vote does not merely depend on age. For a sizeable number of them, it is determined by when they became naturalized citizens. As the Canadian-born Muslims account for only one-quarter of the total Canadian Muslim females, many of them who become eligible to vote for the first time in Canada are past the minimum age bar for eligibility, and some of them are in their 40s, 50s and even older.

Secondly, the voter turnout rates of the young and the older Muslim women are not as far apart as is the case with the Canadian electorate overall. Young Muslim females are indifferent or apathetic to the electoral process like their peers, but older Muslim women take far less interest than their non-Muslim counterparts. For example, twice as many eligible Canadians in the age group 58-67 years voted in the 2000 federal election as those in the 18-24 years range (75% versus 38%).[8]

Chart 1: Voter turnout rates index, faith communities, Jews=100



Source: Statistics Canada, Ethnic Diversity Survey 2003, special tabulations

[7] Jon H. Pammett and Lawrence LeDuc, *Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-voters*, March 2003. www.elections.ca

[8] Keynote speech by Chief Electoral Officer at the Seminar on the Political Engagement of Canadian Youth, Ottawa, October 1, 2004.

Corresponding figures for Muslim females, which pertain to the 2004 election, were 48% versus 32%, according to the results of the Muslim Women's Needs Survey.

Length of stay in Canada is a more appropriate variable than age to describe the behaviour of the Muslim female electorate. The likelihood that a Muslim female will vote increases with the length of stay in Canada, up to a certain point. Recent immigrants are less familiar with the electoral and democratic processes and institutions. Moreover, as they are concerned with earning a livelihood and establishing themselves in their professions, participation in the electoral process is not a high priority. Unlike earlier immigrants, a sizeable number of them regard voting as a choice. For them, the act of voting has to be justified on some instrumental grounds such as good candidates or policies or the perception that their vote will make a difference. These influences show up in the statistics. The Muslim Women's Needs Survey showed that this was more the case with the recent immigrants. Muslim women who immigrated before 1980 had a higher voter turnout rate than those who arrived in the 1980s, and the immigrants of the 1980s had a greater propensity to vote than those who came in the 1990s (Chart 2).

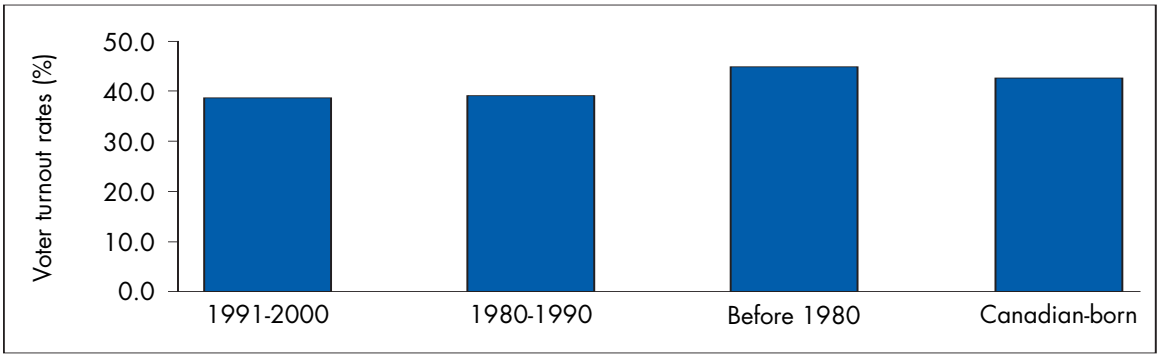
These distinct features of the Muslim female electorate have important implications for the design of programs to increase their involvement. Attention is required not only to attract the young people to polling booths; specific programs are also needed for the older women. While the young Muslim female population is exposed to activities undertaken by electoral agencies to involve the young people, the challenge for Muslim community organizations is to reach the older women.

2.2. CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

General elections are a formal obligation requiring politicians to seek mandate at regular intervals, and give the electorate a chance to express opinion on government policies and individual politicians' performance. However many informal types of political activities go on in-between and civic-minded people also express their opinion in other ways, for example, by speaking out in the media, taking part in demonstrations and rallies, and joining boycotts. Whether participation in such activities is in addition to or in lieu of voting is arguable, but increasingly more people appear to be turning to these informal expressions of civic involvement in free, democratic societies over the years and therefore they are important yardsticks in determining people's involvement in society.

Muslim women are engaged in a variety of activities but the intensity varies. In general, they appear to be more engaged in civic activities that take place in a group or with like-minded people. Signing petitions ranks the highest, followed by participation in rallies,

Chart 2: Muslim female voter turnout rates (%) by period of immigration



Source: CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005

which is a distant second.[9] The Survey did not inquire about the nature of the petitions, but some writers have noted that petitions pertaining to religious rites and rituals draw more attention than those concerned with social and political issues.[10] Nonetheless, it indicates an awareness of the importance of expressing opinion in order to be counted. This consciousness needs to be extended to democratic participation and civic life.

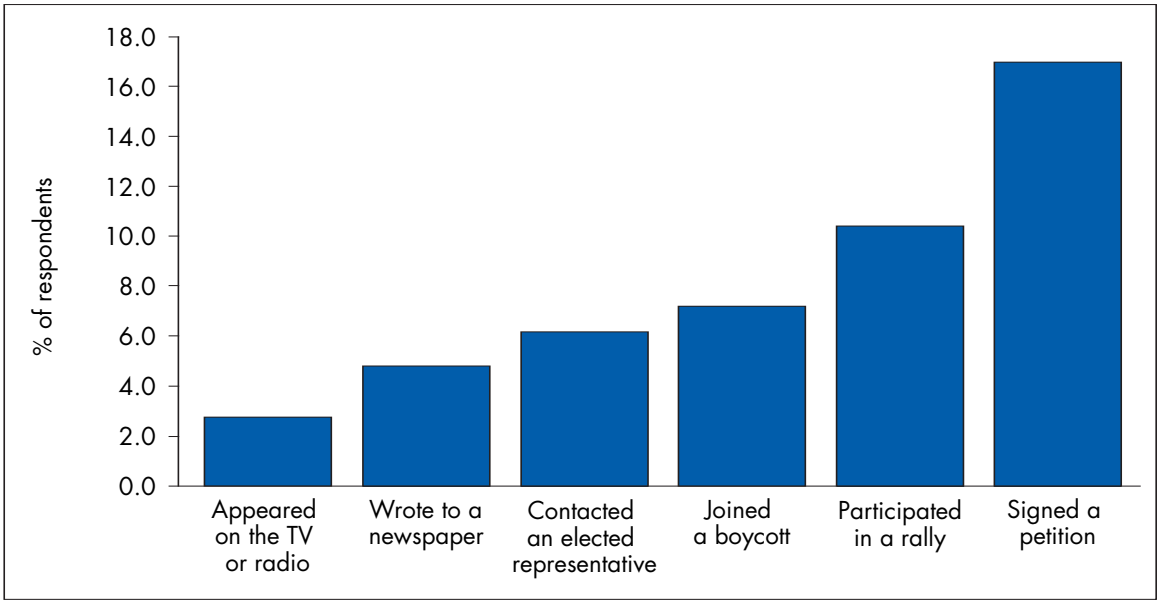
Activities requiring interaction on an individual basis rank lower, partly because involvement in them depends on the willingness of other parties to accommodate Muslim females, and partly because they may be reluctant to come to the attention of public authorities in the post-9/11 environment. Only about 5% reported writing a letter to or an op-ed in a newspaper, and the number of those appearing on radio or TV was even smaller. Lack of visible minority representation in the media has been a subject of discussion.

It is important to note that the above results may have been influenced by the reference period of the Survey, which coincided with the intense debate on Muslim family tribunals, in which positions were drawn, by and large, along the gender line. In addition, pictures of the horrific treatment of Muslim prisoners in Abu Gharaib were still a hot issue as were stories of the desecration of the Qur'an by the American guards.

2.3. LACK OF INTEREST IN PARTY POLITICS

Membership in a political party is an important barometer of a community's interest in policies that are of concern to it and the leadership it would like to see in the country. Political parties serve as a bridge between society and government. People join a party to seek its nomination to run for parliament, to support the nomination of a candidate who shares their

Chart 3: Muslim female involvement in civic activities



Source: CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005

[9] Signing petitions is also more common among Canadians than any other civic activity. 28% of all Canadians, including males and females, reported signing a petition in 2003, and 6% said that they had contacted a newspaper or a politician. See Statistics Canada, *2003 General Social Survey on Social Engagement, Cycle 17: an overview of findings, Catalogue no. 85-598-XIE,* July 2004.

[10] See Shelina Merani, "Dead Woman Walking", www.iqra.com. May 14, 2006.

views for election to the parliament or to the party leadership, and to support a particular ideology. In any case, it indicates their desire to be involved in the democratic process.

Involvement of Muslim females in party politics was analyzed at two levels: party membership – which may be viewed as the threshold level of entry into formal party politics – and nomination to run for parliament, which parties usually reserve for members of long standing or known personalities. On both of these counts, particularly the latter, Muslim female participation is very low. Membership of a political party is not something that many Canadians aspire to or have, it is less popular among visible minorities and Muslim females are further behind. Only 5% of the visible minorities reported belonging to a political party in 2003.[11] Meanwhile 2% of the respondents to the Muslim Women's Needs Survey reported holding a party membership.

The effect of disinterest in party politics can be seen in the small number of Muslim women getting party nomination to contest elections. Only four were supported by a major political party in the 2004 federal election – the highest number ever, including the 2006 federal election – and one of them was elected.

As Muslim women are busy nurturing their families, pursuing their professional careers or supplementing family income they lack the time and the financial independence necessary to launch a political campaign. Attitudes brought from native countries where electoral processes are staged or missing look down upon

Table 1: Muslim female candidates in federal and provincial and territorial elections and their party affiliation, 1995-2004

Federal election	**1997**	**2000**	**2004**
Involvement in federal party politics			
Number of total Muslim candidates	9	10	17
Number of Muslim female candidates	1	1	4
– Number nominated by major parties	1	1	4
– Other parties	0	0	0
Number of Muslim women elected	0	0	1
Provincial and territorial election*	**1995**	**1999**	**2003**
Involvement in provincial party politics			
Number of Muslim female candidates	1	2	1
– Number nominated by three main parties	1	2	1
– Other parties	0	0	0
Number of Muslim women elected to Provincial and territorial legislatures	1	1	1

Source: Abridged from Daood Hamdani, *Muslim Women: From Polling Booths to Parliament,* March 2005, www.ccmw.com

* Dates for provincial elections vary from province to province. For convenience, Ontario election dates have been adopted as the headings.

[11] Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Diversity Survey* 2003, special tabulations. These figures include both males and females.

politics, politicians and political institutions. Often, resistance by family and friends and concern about the reaction of the conservative clergy also stand in the way. One woman candidate running in the 2004 federal election wrote that she was not welcome at her local mosque after she refused to dissociate herself from her party's position on certain social issues.

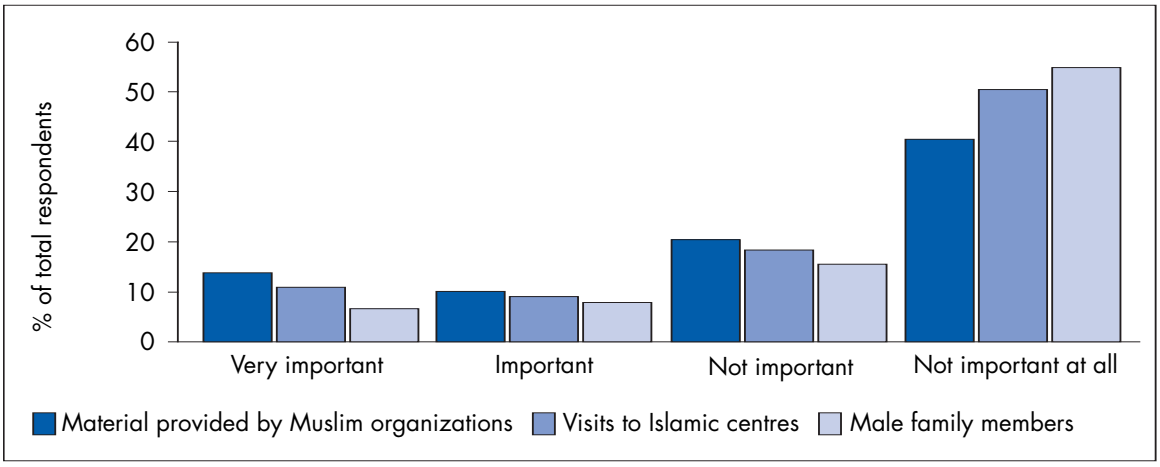
This is not to say that there is no stereotyping of gender roles and double standards in the way a woman in public life is treated in Canada. The obstacles women are expected to overcome are far more than those faced by male politicians. A male politician lamenting the pain of being away from his children because of the demands of political life may be seen as a warm person, whereas a female politician would more likely be criticized for spending time away from her family. There are additional hurdles for Muslims. In a 2004 opinion poll, about 30% of the respondents said that they would not vote for a political party led by a Muslim leader – the highest negative sentiment among several groups which included people of different genders, sexual orientation and ethnic backgrounds.[12] Women's gender adds another dimension to these negative attitudes.

2.4. LESSONS LEARNED FROM EXISTING ACTIVITIES

The existing community activities offer useful lessons for choosing an appropriate program delivery method to increase Muslim female participation. Muslim organizations were very active during the 2004 federal election campaign. For example, voter registration campaigns were launched. Web pages were set up to provide information and urge Muslims to vote. Brochures were prepared to advise voters where to turn for information about balloting, and analyses of the incumbents' performance and new candidates' positions were provided. In a rare break from the past, politicians were invited to speak at Islamic centres and imams urged Muslims to consider voting as a religious duty. These activities were noticed and the media paid unprecedented attention.

However, they had very little impact on the Muslim female voter turnout rate, which increased only slightly, from an estimated 39% in 2000 to 42% in 2004. Three-fourths of the respondents to Muslim Women's Needs Survey reported that the material provided by Muslim organizations on-line or by other means and

Chart 4: Effectiveness of existing Muslim activities



Source: CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005

[12] Ipsos-Reid, www.cric.ca/en_re/analysis

visits to Islamic centres to gather material were only slightly or not important as a source of information in the 2004 federal election campaign (Chart 4).

The problem, however, was not so much with the content[13] as with the methods used to deliver it. The activity was focused in Islamic centres because they (a) are the only well established Muslim institution in the country; (b) provide access to large audiences; and (c) are a suitable venue to connect with male non-voters who see an inconsistency between religious beliefs and participation in a secular democracy. But most of the mosques are not women-friendly: women are crowded out by men or discouraged from attending. Introduction of new functions in addition to worship in the mosque is a welcome step towards reclaiming its original role as a mediating institution between the individual and society. However, restrictions on women act as a serious barrier to fulfilling that role. If mosques were chosen under the assumption that men would make voting decisions for the women of the family, the survey results reject this notion; 85% rated a male member of the family as not an important source of information (Chart 4). Instead, they relied on other sources such as the TV or newspapers for information.

Political parties did not seem to be any more aware of the limitations of the mosque. Timing of the candidates' visit further restricted their reach to women. The Friday congregational worship ensured a large but all male audience. The few women who were able to make their way into a few mosques at that time would be secluded and unable to interact with the candidates, if at all they were able to hear them.

Not only does this arrangement cut women off, it also puts non-Muslim female candidates at a disadvantage against their male opponents because mosques might not allow women to address largely male audiences.

Communication over the Internet was the second most commonly used method by the political organizations. Far fewer women than men have access to it, and in some households that have an Internet connection, women are less likely to use it than men because of the lower levels of proficiency in English or French.

2.5. LACK OF PARTICIPATION: APATHY OR CYNICISM?

What accounts for Muslim women's disconnect from the political system? Is it the process, the parties, the institutions or something else? There are numerous reasons why they abstain from voting, ranging from apathy to distrust of politicians and cynicism of political institutions, with a few believing that voting in a secular democracy is against their faith. The survey findings were aggregated into four broad categories to understand what type of action may be needed to increase their participation.

The principal factor for abstaining from voting had little to do with attitudes (Chart 5). Rather, the reasons were personal or related to the voting process. They include factors like illness, absence from the riding, family or work-related responsibilities, and administrative factors like not knowing where to vote, or name missing from the voter list. It may be argued that personal factors could be excuses to justify the lack of interest but statistical tests done in other Canadian studies do not support this hypothesis.[14] More than two in five non-voters were in this category. It means that if personal and administrative factors could be overcome, these non-voters would ideally vote, and this alone would boost the Muslim female voter turnout to 63%.

[13] In particular, the Canadian Islamic Congress report "Towards Informed and Committed Voting" received a good deal of attention in the mainstream media and from politicians. The report rated the performance of sitting members of parliament and when an update was issued during the 2006 federal election campaign, some candidates, including the then foreign minister, wrote to clarify or re-state their positions. The report is available at www.canadianislamiccongress.com.

[14] Pommett and LeDuc, op. cit.

The second largest group of non-voters cited reasons that suggest a lack of interest in the entire political process (Chart 5). Some examples are: I do not care; I was not aware of the election date; my vote was meaningless. They are politically aware. They realize the importance of participatory democracy and agree that voting is a constructive way to strengthen the community's voice in national affairs. However, some of them are disillusioned with politicians because they do not raise issues such as discrimination, racial profiling, civil liberties and evaluation and recognition of foreign credentials, which are their top priorities. They can be involved if Muslims organize town hall meetings with candidates and raise issues of concern to them.

Only about 10% can be described as non-voters who might be difficult to engage. They have negative opinions of politicians and political institutions or they mistakenly believe that voting for a secular government is against their religious beliefs (Chart 5).

2.6. WHAT IS NEEDED

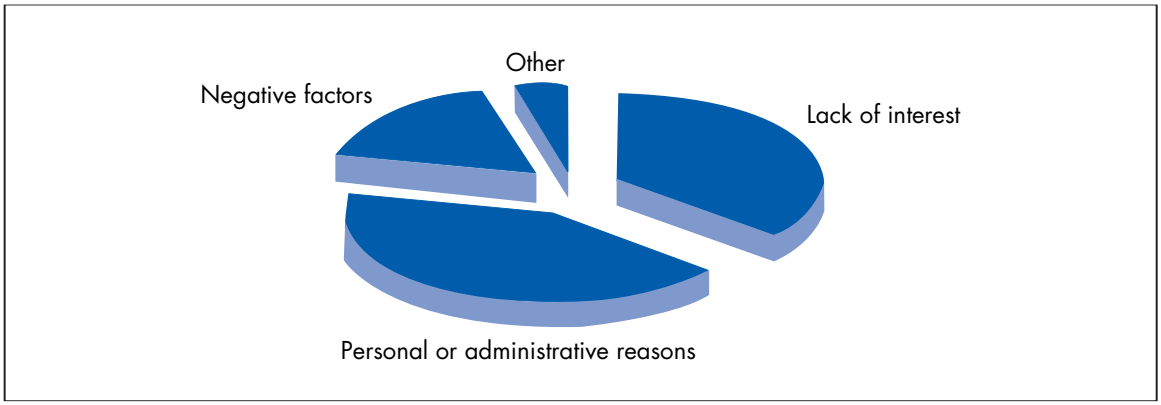
A multi-pronged strategy with the core objectives of raising awareness, educating the community and making the process more accessible is needed. Some of these needs are critical, others are strategic. In addition, enabling mechanisms are required to fulfill these needs.

2.6.1. Critical needs

Improvements in access to the political process can result in substantial gains in the Muslim female participation rate. There are several aspects to the political process, but voter registration is fundamental. Given the current environment and a feeling in the community that they are being watched, there is a sense of unease, even distrust, about giving out personal information of any kind without first knowing where it may eventually end up. Some Muslim organizations were concerned about the possible erosion of their efforts to register Muslim voters after learning that Elections Canada might share electoral rolls with other government agencies, raising concern about who may get them and how they might be used.

Voter registration should be aimed at two special groups of people: those who are entering the electorate for the first time as they reach the voting age; and those whose address changes between the elections. Both of these groups are disproportionately large among Muslim females. About 10% of the total Muslim female electorate eligible to vote in the next election will be eligible for the first time. Another 10% became eligible in the last election but two-thirds of them are estimated to have abstained from voting. This means that one in five Muslim female voters in the next federal

Chart 5: Why Muslim females do not vote



Source: CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005

election will be new to the process. They have to be reminded that they have attained the voting age and educated about the value of their vote.

Secondly, given that Muslim females are the youngest faith community, they are very mobile and relocate to attend university, take up a job or form a family. About 11% move every five years. By the next election, one in ten will have a new address, with one-third among them in a different province. If they did not inform the federal, provincial and municipal election agencies of their change of address, they would miss all the three elections. They should be contacted and reminded to do so.

A third target group consists of more recent immigrants who speak neither English nor French, irrespective of their age. Nearly one in ten Muslim females speaks neither of the two official languages. They need to be informed in a language they understand best.

The Muslim population is spread over all the federal ridings except a handful of them. It is important to identify ridings with heavy population of young Muslim females or of recent immigrants who speak neither English nor French and concentrate registration activities in those constituencies.

Finally, raising the awareness of both the community and community leaders of the low level of political participation is vital. Since no reliable estimate of the Muslim voter turnout rate was available until recently, neither the community nor the leaders may be aware of how low it is. Election of four Muslims to the parliament in 2004 and again in 2006 has been mistakenly taken as an indication of a high degree of Muslim involvement, yet three of them won in ridings which are not the top Muslim constituencies. Shaking up this sense of complacency is critical. It is important that the community and its leaders embrace the challenge of electoral participation with a keen sense of importance and enthusiasm.

2.6.2. Strategic needs

There is a need for educating and informing eligible females about the electoral process and their right and responsibility to vote. Such material must be delivered through channels to which they have access. For example, it could be brochures or video presentations in collaboration with social service agencies that are the closest point of contact with them. The material should be prepared in the language they are comfortable with. Create public service announcements for broadcast on community TV and radio programs about why democracy is important and why it is important to vote. Women-friendly Islamic centres can also be involved in promoting the material, and enlightened clergy can be co-opted to orient their sermons towards this type of education. Student associations on university and college campuses should not be overlooked.

In so many other areas of professional achievement, the gender gap has been narrowing, but not in politics. Some people argued that the progress towards equality in higher ranks in law, medicine and academia, usually regarded as the gateways to politics, would spill into politics. This does not seem to be happening. In the current parliament, only 20% of the representatives are women, and Canada ranks 45th in the world in terms of female representation in national legislatures.

It may be time to think of introducing ideas similar to employment equity into politics which would see political parties requiring riding associations to exercise due diligence in recruiting visible minority female candidates in ridings where they have significant presence. Campaign teams of the political parties should reflect the electoral make-up. A women's coalition should be formed around this issue.

2.6.3. Enabling mechanisms

In order to fulfill both the critical and strategic needs, enabling instruments will have to put in place. Local organizations have neither the resources nor the mandate to take up this task. It is best suited for a national organization.

2.6.4. New delivery channels

The effectiveness of a service depends on both the quality of the content and the effectiveness of the method of delivery. The content of some of the activities initiated by Muslims during the 2004 federal election campaign was good, but it failed to reach a large segment of the intended group. Material sent over the electronic media was of no use to many Muslim women who do not own a personal computer or do not have an Internet connection. Nor did it reach those who do not understand either of the two official languages. New delivery channels, e.g. social service agencies, the media should be utilized.

3. Economic integration: overlooked and undervalued

Immigrants make an important contribution to the Canadian economy. They set up new businesses and introduce new products and services. They fill low level positions – replacing Canadians who move up to more skilled jobs – and niches in leading edge technologies. Canadian businesses appear to be aware of the contribution they can make and appreciate that the Canadian immigration department does a good job at recruiting people with the needed skills,[15] but their human resource strategies and hiring practices do not fully reflect it.

Hiring visible minorities may have been a decent thing to do or a correction of imbalances in the past, but now it just makes good business sense. They not only provide a sizeable segment of the pool from where the future business leaders, professionals and factory workers will come, but also of the market to which Canadian businesses will have to increasingly cater. It is forecast that without immigration there will be no growth in the country's labor force after 2011 and no growth in the population after 2026. Canada will have to compete with other countries to attract and retain immigrants and Muslim women will be an increasing presence.

3.1. OVERLOOKED

A vast majority of Muslim females depends on the labour market for their livelihood. Four-fifths of total Muslim household income comes from the labour market. Therefore, well functioning labour markets that produce economically optimum and socially desirable outcomes are key to the economic integration of Muslim women, as well as to an efficient national economy.

About one-half of Muslim females in the qualifying age actually participate in the labour market, that is, they are either working or looking for a job. The rest are still in school, completing formal education or upgrading their skills, are retired or are raising families. Compared to other faith communities, their participation is low, and reflects many factors including cultural backgrounds and beliefs, attitudes towards working outside the home, rules and regulations, availability of proper childcare facilities, etc. It also indicates their experiences of job searching. After a sustained period of unemployment or working in jobs below their qualifications or unrelated to their skills, some become so discouraged that they drop out of the labour market and go back to school or work in family businesses, often without getting paid.[16]

Of those who are in the labour market, most work for others, and some help in family businesses or set up their own businesses or consultancies. An overwhelming majority (91%) works in the business or public sector while the rest run their own businesses or professional practices. Some of these businesses are multi-million dollar enterprises, but most are small, have limited growth potential and involve long hours of work.

In spite of the fact that Muslim women are highly educated and specialize in leading edge technologies – Internet, biotechnologies, medicine, mathematics and engineering – entry into the job market is not easy. Over 6% of adult females, 25 years old and above, have a master's or doctorate degree, but more than 16% looking for a job cannot find one. In other words, proportionately, twice as many Muslim women compared to all other Canadian women have post-graduate degrees, but more than twice as many Muslim women than all women looking for a job cannot find one.

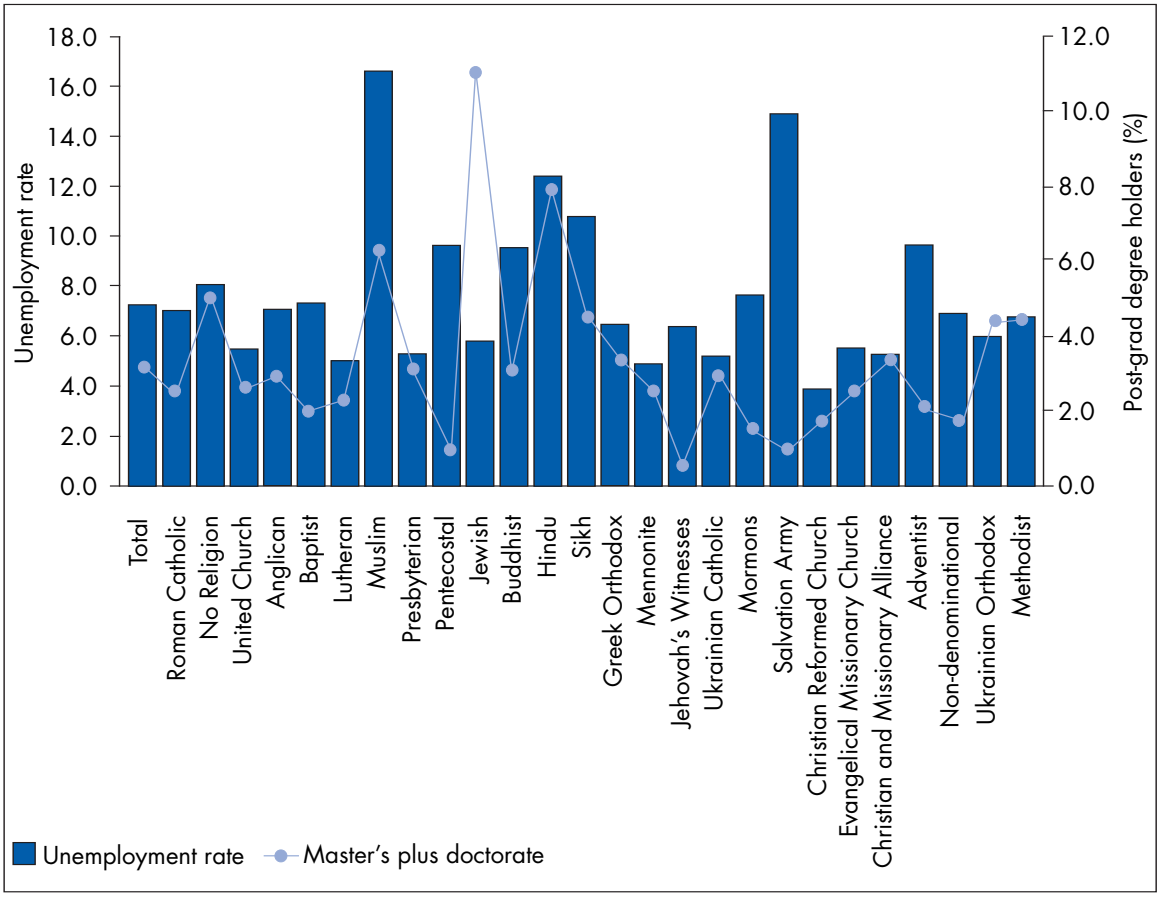
[15] Public Policy Forum, *Bringing Employers into the Immigration Debate,* 2005. www.ppf.com

[16] Hamdani, *Muslim Women beyond the Perceptions, 2004,* op. cit.

How do Muslims fare compared with other faith communities? In 2001, the latest year for which comparable data are available, Muslim women experienced the highest unemployment rate among the two dozen or so faith communities in the country although they are among the most highly educated faith communities among those shown in Chart 6. Although the information is dated it should be mentioned that the community patterns of unemployment rates and educational levels do not change from year to year.

There is an obvious disconnect when so many university graduates in mathematics, engineering, applied sciences, and biotechnologies with proficiency in both official languages are unemployed in the midst of shortages.[17] A number of reasons have been offered ranging from discrimination to the lack of Canadian work experience. The employment equity program has made progress in terms both of redressing the imbalance and of increasing awareness of the changing society but fallen short of its goals set for employment. In the public service, visible minorities and, by implication, Muslim females remain under-represented, and there is a concern about the lack of progress in appointing visible minorities into the executive group.[18]

Chart 6: Unemployment and higher education



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

[17] For details, see ibid.

[18] Statement by Maria Barrados before the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights, November 21, 2005.

A sizeable number of them are working in a field other than their specialization. Many women responding to the Muslim Women's Needs Survey noted this predicament. This is corroborated by a government study of skilled immigrants who arrived in Canada in 1990 which found that 58% of them were employed in a field other than that for which they had training and experience and that required lower levels of skills and education. Furthermore, one in four degree holders were in jobs needing only high school education.[19] While comparative data for faith communities were not available from this study, other related evidence suggests that the Muslim females experience a higher incidence of underemployment.

3.2. UNDERVALUED

High levels of unemployment and the high incidence of underemployment also have a serious adverse affect on their income, which lags well behind the average for all females in the country. Several studies have pointed out the income gap between visible minorities and the rest of the population. A study specifically relating to Muslim women, done for CCMW, pointed out (see Table 2 below) that even after controlling for a number of factors such as the source of income, part- or full-time job, number of weeks worked in the year and industry, a Muslim female earned 10% less than her non-Muslim counterpart.[20] Muslim females working full-time, full-year in 2000 earned $31,550, as compared with the average of $34,900 for all females.

The analysis carried out for this report looked at income disparity from a number of angles. First, it examined the progress over time. Muslim females were divided into groups according to the period of their migration to Canada, beginning with the 1960s (See Chart 7 on the next page). Then comparisons were made between groups, using 2000 as the benchmark year. Second, each group of Muslim females was compared with a similar group of all female immigrants for each period. For example, we analyzed the current income of Muslim females who migrated to Canada during the 1960s in relation to all other immigrant women arriving during the same period. This eliminates the effect of any advantages that one group may have over the other in terms of the period of adjustment, experience acquired in Canada, economic conditions in the country, changes in rules and regulations over time and so on. Third, instead of focusing on a single figure such as average income (Table 2), which can be skewed by a few individuals with very high or very low income, we compared the concentration of low income and high income individuals among Muslim females with all females in the country. The cut-offs for low and high incomes were set at under $20,000 and over $60,000, respectively.

Comparisons were expressed in the form of a ratio in which Muslim females are the numerator and all females are the denominator. Two ratios were estimated: low income ratio is a measure of the concentration of low income earners and is depicted by the bars and measured along the left axis in Chart 7; while the high income

Table 2: Income comparisons: Muslim and all females, Canada

Concept of income	Muslim as % of all females
Average income, all sources	70.0
Median income, all sources	60.2
Average income, employment only	78.8
Average income, full-time employees	90.4

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 census, special tabulations and CCMW, *Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005*

[19] Statistics Canada, *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants in Canada: Process, Progress and prospects,* September 2003.

[20] Hamdani, *Muslim Women: Beyond the Perceptions.* Op. cit.

ratio indicates the concentration of high income earners and is represented by the dots, measured along the right axis. A ratio with a value of one means that there are no differences between Muslim and all females.

As well as confirming the findings summarized in Table 2, Chart 7 further shows that the disparity is not due to a few very low income earners but is more common. There is not only a disproportionately higher concentration of low income earners (women earning less than $20,000 a year) among Muslim women but high income earners (with income above $60,000) are also disproportionately fewer (bars and dots labeled Total in Chart 7).

3.2.1. Muslim women falling further behind

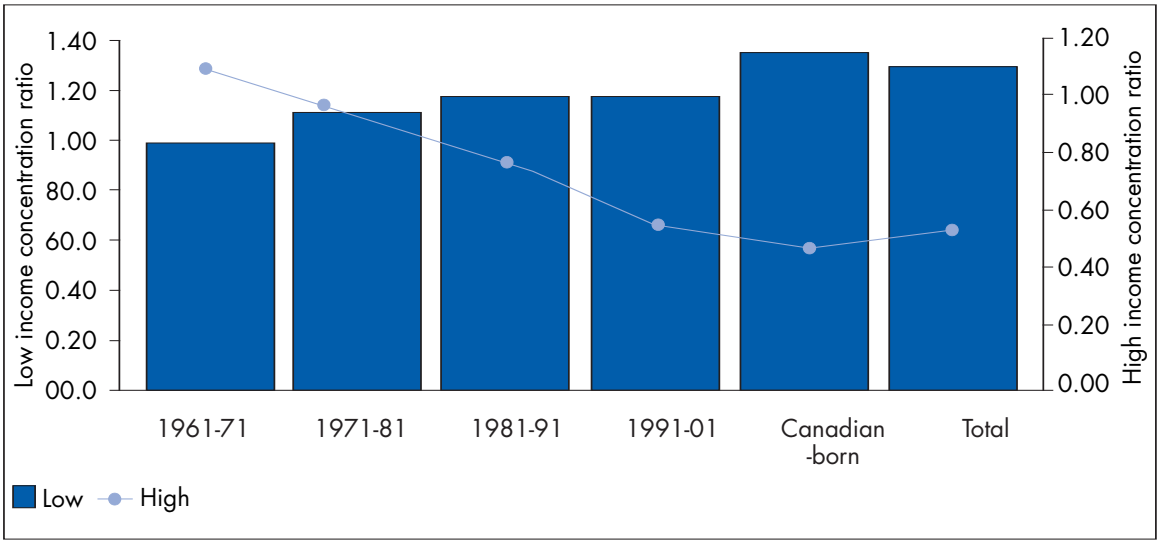
Muslim women who migrated in the 1960s are better-off than all women who immigrated at the same time: more Muslim females are earning over $60,000 and fewer are in the range below $20,000, as compared with all immigrants of the 1960s (Chart 7 bar labeled 1961-71). They are also the best placed of all Muslim women who came later on.

However, Muslim females who came to Canada after the 1960s have consistently fared worse. They have been increasingly trapped in low paying jobs and those who made it to average positions have found it hard to break through to higher income positions. A Muslim female who came to Canada in the 1990s is only half as likely to be in a well-paying job as another immigrant of the same era. On the other hand, she is about 20% more likely to be earning less than $20,000 than her counterpart.

3.2.2. Canadian-born Muslims are not better off than immigrants

According to the conventional wisdom, descendents of new settlers do economically better than their parents. The inter-generational progress has been observed to take effect with the very first native-born generation because it has several advantages. It is more at home and therefore likely to be a better organizational fit (more at ease with the corporate culture), a very important consideration in hiring practices. Second, the quality of their diplomas cannot be disputed because unlike their parents who were educated in foreign universities

Chart 7: Concentration of low and high income Muslim relative to non-Muslim females (change over time)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census and CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005

they received their education in Canadian institutions, making them a better 'job fit' also.

However, we did not find evidence of inter-generational progress among Muslim females. On the contrary, those born in Canada did not do as well as their immigrant mothers. They were also worse off when compared with all Canadian-born females. This raises many questions. Are Canadian-born Muslim women less qualified than their immigrant mothers? Are they in fields that are less in demand? Are they facing discrimination in the labor market? The questions require more research.

3.2.3. Incidence of low income is high among Muslim females

Income in absolute terms does not provide much information unless seen in a context. There are many different ways to look at it. Relating it to expenditures is one way to get a sense of the standard of living. LICO (low-income cut-off), designed and updated by Statistics Canada, is used for such comparisons. Based on this yardstick, the incidence of low income is high among Muslim females. According to the survey findings, close to one in three Muslim women live in households with income below LICO, i.e. their income level is such that more than one-half of it is taken up by the necessities. This is slightly higher than 29% estimated for the visible minority females but well above the 18% for all Canadian females.

Muslim females in the low income range are not a homogenous group. They can be professionals who are unemployed or work in low paying jobs. They include women working in part-time or term positions where the pay is usually low. They are working seniors who supplement their meager pension incomes by working past the retirement age. Also included among them are female heads of households, most of whom are young, 25 to 44 years old, and some among them have neither the skills nor the work experience to adequately support their families. Also included are women who, after having devoted years to nurturing and raising their families, find themselves alone, without a spouse and income, as their experience in managing the household and raising responsible citizens, has little value in the marketplace.

Caution should be exercised in using LICO to make comparisons between ethnic and cultural groups.[21] Being an essentially statistical construct, it cannot take into account differences in lifestyles which determine spending patterns. For example, some communities place a higher priority on owning their dwelling and therefore are quite willing to spend a higher proportion of their income on housing. Others may prefer a lifestyle of more entertainment and less housing – smaller house or rented. Second, it does not take into account the wealth or net worth of the family.

3.2.4. Muslim women working past the retirement age

As the Muslim population is young, seniors do not receive much attention in the planning for the community. But their issues are unique and important. Some of them are still in the labor market. As shown in Chart 8, the labor market participation rates of Muslim females are much lower relative to all females in all age groups, but Muslim women past the retirement age are nearly as active as their Canadian counterparts. Being on fixed income, the purchasing power of which erodes with inflation, some of them have to supplement their pension by going back to work.

Why do Muslim women work in their retirement years when they should be doing interesting things? An overwhelming majority works out of necessity. Some of them arrived in Canada at a mature age and do not have sufficient pension income to support them. Others worked long years but still did not collect enough pension credits because they moved from one job to another in search of a career and their pension credits were not portable. There are others who go to work to support their grown-up children who do not earn enough to provide for their families.

[21] See Daood Hamdani, "Income Disparity between Muslims and non-Muslims in Canada," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 7, 1, 1986.

3.3. BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

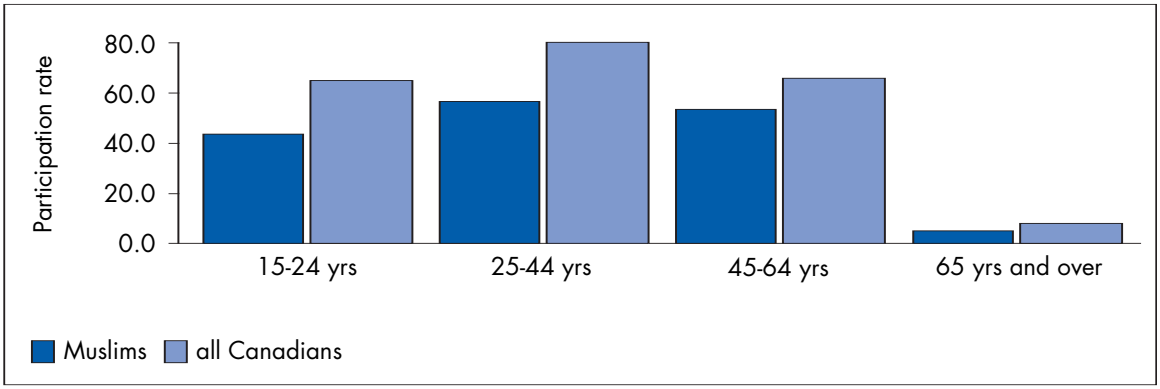
As seen in the previous sections, there is a high incidence of unemployment and underemployment among Muslim females. There are many and varied reasons for this phenomenon. The Survey of Muslim Women's Needs tried to narrow them for the purpose of developing targeted programs. Respondents were asked to identify the five most important barriers from a list of 19. The selection varied according to their educational, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The results are summarized in Table 3. Some of the barriers are generically the same and may be combined for designing the programs, e.g. employers raising educational requirements (item 1b) and employers benefiting from underemployment (item 4). Others are more specific and unique.

Proficiency in the English language and employers raising educational requirements beyond what the job really requires when there are many applicants were both ranked at the top. While the lack of English and, in the case of respondents from Quebec, French proficiency was cited as a significant barrier, bilingualism – which was also offered as a choice – was not seen as such. It may be partly due to the fact that bilingualism becomes an issue in senior positions in the federal public service which many Muslim women do not reach in the first place.

On the question of language proficiency as a barrier to employment, there was a clear divide along educational qualifications. Those with professional degrees did not see language as a problem, but those with non-professional qualifications noted that employers used lack of English or French proficiency as the reason for rejecting their candidacy.

Raising educational requirements by the employer is characterized by the Public Policy Forum as systematically discriminating against recent immigrants.[22] When employers receive many applications for the same job, it is easy to raise the level of education or training required for that job. Focus group of small and medium sized business firms organized for the Public Policy Forum study said that employing immigrants in a position needing less than their qualifications was a "win-win" situation because it provides immigrants with Canadian experience and provides the employer with a qualified worker.

Chart 8: Senior Muslim females in the labour market



Source: CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005 and Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

[22] Public Policy Forum, *Bringing Employers into the Immigration Debate*, 2005. www.ppf.com

The question of the evaluation of international credentials also ranks high as a barrier. Although medical graduates and, to a lesser extent, other regulated professionals are at the centre of the public debate, issues of the equivalence of international and Canadian credentials and work experience are much wider. It may well be that some foreign credentials are not at par with Canadian universities, but little research has been done or published on whether business perception of non-equivalence is based on employers' personal experiences or is a matter of general belief. A survey of over 1,200 small and medium sized employers, done for the Public Policy Forum, found that almost half of the respondents had had no experience verifying the education or work credentials of recent immigrants and very few could name a credential evaluation organization. Further, more than three in four businesses reported that immigrants they hire do not have training needs that are different from Canadian-born employees.[23]

The respondents felt that discrimination played a part in the labour market, but they appeared divided on its cause. Although the majority attributed it to race and ethnicity, religious discrimination also ranked high as a barrier. This finding is consistent with other surveys identifying workplace as the most likely location where discrimination occurs. Data on religious discrimination in employment are not available for Canada, but in a very recent survey, 12% of federal public servants reported that discrimination had adversely affected their career progress.[24] The U.S. data show an increase in complaints by Muslims about discrimination in employment. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, general religious discrimination charges increased to 3.1% of all discrimination charges in 2004 from 1.9% in 1992. The number of charges alleging discrimination filed by Muslims doubled from the four years preceding 9/11 to the four years after.[25]

Table 3: Ten Top Barriers to Employment as perceived by the respondents
(in the declining order of importance)

1a. English language proficiency
1b. Employers raising educational requirements above what is needed for the job
2. Lack of adequate and effective machinery to evaluate and recognize international credentials and experience
3. Racial discrimination
4. Employers benefiting from underemployment
5. Requirement of Canadian work experience
6. Workplace practices (standards, etc)
7. Religious discrimination
8. Employers looking for younger workers
9. Employers not fully engaged in promoting diversity

Source: CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005

[23] ibid.

[24] Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, *What You told Us: 2005 Public Service-wide Results*, July 2006. www.hrma-agrh.gc.ca/

[25] Amy Joyce, "How symbols of faith can add to interview stress", *Washington Post*, reprinted in *The Ottawa Citizen*, Oct. 15, 2005, p. D15.

Lack of the Canadian work experience was among the five major barriers. It is one of the most intractable obstacles. One cannot get the Canadian experience without first getting a job, but a job requires Canadian work experience. Muslim females' concern is corroborated by other evidence. One in four businesses require Canadian experience and only one-quarter accept international experience but not necessarily at par with the Canadian experience.[26] From the employers' point of view, the Canadian work experience is evidence that the applicant can work in the Canadian environment, can meet the Canadian standards and is likely to be an organizational fit.

3.4 AFFIRMING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Affirmative action and employment equity programs have made progress in addressing the imbalance in the representation of identifiable minority groups in the workplace. However, the goal of ensuring an equitable representation of visible minorities in the federal public service has yet to be achieved. Public service draws more attention because it is an institution unlike any other. For it, affirmative action is not simply a program; it is a necessity to serve all Canadians.

In 1996, Jocelyn Bourgon, then clerk of the Privy Council, outlined the great opportunity that lay ahead for improving the representation of minorities in the civil service as a whole and in the executive cadre in particular. After years of cuts in government spending, downsizing in the federal public service was coming to an end, and budget surpluses and active recruitment to fill positions of the retiring employees presented "an unprecedented opportunity to change the demographic profile of the Public Service of Canada..."[27]

Certainly, progress has been made. Imbalances in employment in both public and private sectors have been reduced. Equally important is the increase in efforts to raise awareness about the changing workplace. However, the objective set for making the public service representative of visible minorities is still to be achieved. Almost a decade after Bourgon's address, the President of the Public Service Commission told a senate committee in 2005 that "the gap between the representation of visible minorities in the public service and their workforce availability continues to persist," and the Commission was "concerned with the lack of progress in appointing visible minorities into the executive group."[28]

In the private sector, while businesses are aware of the contribution newcomers make and appreciate that the immigration department does a good job at admitting people with the needed skills, about one-half of the employers surveyed said that they did not look at job applications that had foreign qualifications.[29] Among the candidates whose applications get overlooked, Muslims – and among them females – are likely to be proportionately more than others. Some studies have pointed out that applicants with Muslim female names are less likely to be invited for an interview than others. This issue was also identified by Muslim women during the focus groups across the country.

At the same time, the profile of the labour force and the marketplace – into which businesses sell their products – is changing. It is forecast that immigration will account for all of the country's labour force growth by 2011 and for all of Canada's population growth by 2026.[30] Canadian labour force and marketplace will have more and more visible minorities, in particular Muslim females. Statistics Canada projects

[26] Public Policy Forum, op. cit.

[27] Jocelyn Bourgon, *Women and Work: The Road to Gender Equality: Progress and Challenges*, the 1996 Jean Edmonds Lecture, Montréal, March 4, 1996.

[28] Statement by Maria Barrados, op. cit.

[29] Public Policy Forum, op. cit.

[30] Public Policy Forum, op. cit.

that in ten years from now, Muslim Canadians will form over 4% of the country's population, which is more than double their share in 2001.[31] The Muslim female population will rise faster than the male and the gender ratio, which is currently skewed in favor of men, will move towards a balance.

Companies have to find ways to survive and grow in this new environment. Business firms that wait for diverse people to meld into a homogeneous, monolithic culture will not be around to take advantage of opportunities that will arise – and in fact are already arising – from diversity. We simply have to learn to manage diversity. The challenge is to create an environment in which no one is unfairly disadvantaged and to get from a heterogeneous labor force the same productivity, quality and commitment that managers got from the old, homogeneous work force.

In the fiercely competitive world, competence – and attitudes – of managers matter more than ever. Managing diversity means enabling every member of the work force to perform to her or his potential. It means getting from employees what employers have a right to expect. In a country seeking competitive advantage in a global economy, the goal of managing diversity is to develop our capacity to accept, incorporate and empower the diverse human talents of a diverse nation. It is our reality. It must become our strength.

Integrating diversity in the workplace is an area in which government – through legislation and incentives – and business organizations are involved in, but measures are not aimed at faith communities although they benefit them indirectly. Muslim community organizations can take certain steps that will reinforce government and business initiatives.

Muslim community organizations should present to business and employee referral agencies the side of Muslim female workers that may not be apparent to them. Large businesses have enough resources to learn about the community, if they so wish, but an overwhelming majority of Canadian businesses is small or medium-sized and has neither the resources nor time to study these aspects of the diverse workforce. The following strategies might prove useful in addressing these needs.

1. It is important to convey to them that they will benefit from understanding the international credentials and doing work force planning that emphasizes the quality of their abilities. This can give them a competitive advantage over others when they recognize that:

- Muslim female workers may not have the Canadian work experience but their performance in another country will likely be repeated in Canada, if they are given an opportunity;
- Their multi-linguistic proficiency is a competitive advantage in emerging local markets and growing international markets;
- They may not be as familiar with the 'Canadian way' as others, but their different cultural perspectives are sources of new ideas, new products, new services, and new ways of doing things;
- Their high levels of education, knowledge of different cultures and multi-linguistic skills are critical competencies in building networks, understanding the cultures of the exporters' markets and establishing relationships with global suppliers.

2. Produce brochures and videos to dispel the stereotype of Muslim women and to communicate that a Canadian Muslim woman is no different from others in promoting the interest of the organization for which she works, by:

- Bringing Canadian employers face to face with their stereotype of Muslim women;
- Documenting cases where Muslim women have risen to positions of leadership in community service, business, sports and public life;

[31] See source in note 7.

- Making documentaries of one or more of these women, showing a day in their work life, conducting meetings, dealing with colleagues, negotiating on behalf of their employer, etc.
- Encouraging Muslim or other workers to write stories in company newsletters about Muslim employees who have made contributions within the company or in the community.

3. Help Muslim women in their job search, by:

- Setting up or facilitating networking through local chapters, using the model employed by business schools: business cum social gathering. Invite officials of one company at a time to talk about the company or an important business issue. It might be easier to start with companies doing business in Muslim countries or involved with the community in Canada;
- Involving Muslim women – and men – who have risen to senior positions in guiding women looking for jobs;
- Starting mentorship programs with prominent Muslims and others who understand their difficulties.

4. Social Engagement

It would be too simplistic to derive conclusions about the overall integration of Muslim women on the basis of political participation and economic integration. Involvement in politics and experiences in the job market reflect and are influenced by what goes on in other aspects of their daily lives. Therefore, we need to learn about their social interactions with and within the broader society in order to develop a fuller understanding.

Attitudes and behaviours are discussed first, followed by information on the social activities and interactions of Muslim females. Attitudes are a two-way street: how does the broader society look at particular groups and how do these groups, in turn, view the broader society. This is discussed under discrimination and sense of belonging. Involvement in various types of organizations including social, cultural, recreational and religious is discussed, followed by a brief account of social contacts.

4.1. DISCRIMINATION

Some people react to discrimination with more determination to take their rightful place in society. In other cases, it stifles self expression and causes the community to withdraw from active participation. The real harm done by discrimination is not anger and a sense of vulnerability that the victim feels but it lies in the degradation of the very characteristics that form an individual's personality. For example, a study noted instances of Muslim women trying to hide their identity in the aftermath of 9/11. Some of them who used to wear a headscarf abandoned it or exchanged it for a less distinguishable covering. Others stopped taking a day off work on *Eid* in order to avoid drawing their colleagues' attention to their religious identity.[32]

Intractability of discrimination because of its subjective nature makes it difficult to assess the degree of its prevalence in the society. Therefore, three approaches were employed: self-assessment by Muslim women; public perception of discrimination against them; and the broader society's attitudes towards them.

The data gathered unequivocally shows that Muslim females – and males – are the main target of unfair treatment in the country.[33] This is true whether we look at discrimination from the eyes of the Muslims or from a public perspective, whether we count the number of people affected or the frequency with which they are victimized.

About 44% of the respondents to the Muslim Women's Needs Survey said that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment. Visible minorities are not the only women affected; those of European descent also face discrimination although they are relatively less likely to be targeted.

Opinion polls figures, which are in the range of 30s, are lower because they include males. Women are more vulnerable to discrimination because of their gender and, in the case of Muslims, headscarf, which has been turned into an issue. Nearly two in five Canadians polled support the French ban on headscarf in public schools, with this support rising to 52% in Quebec (Chart 9).

While the degree of discrimination and frequency of such incidences faced by Muslim females are deplorable, it is disquieting that they are also at a greater risk of being victimized even as the society is becoming more accepting and inclusive. Three years after the burst of hate crimes and discrimination in the wake of September 2001 and also after numerous outreach initiatives undertaken by Muslims and other faith communities, a large

[32] Samira Hussain, *Voices of Muslim Women*, June 2004, www.ccmw.com

[33] For a detailed discussion, see Hamdani, *Triple Jeopardy*, op. cit.

number of Canadians think that discrimination against Muslims is rising.

The rise in anti-Muslim sentiment is in sharp contrast to the general decline or no change in racism or discrimination against minorities. For every one person who saw discrimination as more of a problem in 2004 than before, there were two Canadians who felt that it had decreased, and a vast majority said that there was no change. More or less the same impression existed about the anti-Jewish sentiment, i.e. those who felt that anti-Jewish feeling had risen were outnumbered two-to-one by those who observed a decline.

However, Canadians' perception of how Muslims were being treated was quite different. While only 11% saw discrimination against minorities as more of a problem than before, four times as many observed that anti-Muslim sentiment was on the rise.

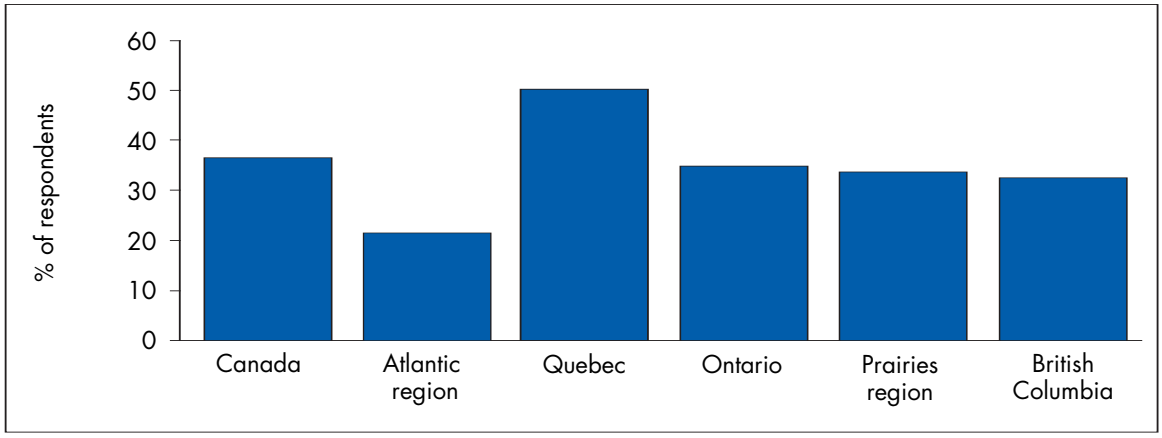
Canadians across the country believe that Muslims encounter discrimination and unfair treatment. But what about their attitudes and how would they interact with Muslims? As it is highly unlikely that any one would admit harbouring prejudice or discriminating, except those who openly belong to or sympathize with racist groups, an assessment was made of their comfort levels in dealings with Muslims, and with other communities in order to place the information in context.

As attitudes are formed at home and in school and are then carried over into personal relationships and business dealings in adult life, four indicators covering different phases of life were used. How at ease would Canadians be with a Muslim teacher in their children's school? Would they be comfortable working with a Muslim boss? At the social level, would they be upset if their son married a Muslim? Finally, how willing would they be to trust affairs of the state to a Muslim political leader? These are not entirely hypothetical examples. Canadians are increasingly likely to find themselves in these situations, as visible minorities and non-Christian faith communities are increasing faster than the total population.

On the whole, the results[34] present a picture of an inclusive society. Canadians are open to having members of other faith and ethnic communities as their boss at work, teacher at their children's school, or having them as their daughter-in-law. However, this does not apply equally to their relationships with all groups.

Their comfort level depends on the community with which they are dealing and the context in which they

Chart 9: Public support for French ban on headscarf



Source: Jodey Michael Derouin, Perception of Discrimination, Nov. 2004; original research by Environics

[34] See note to Chart 9.

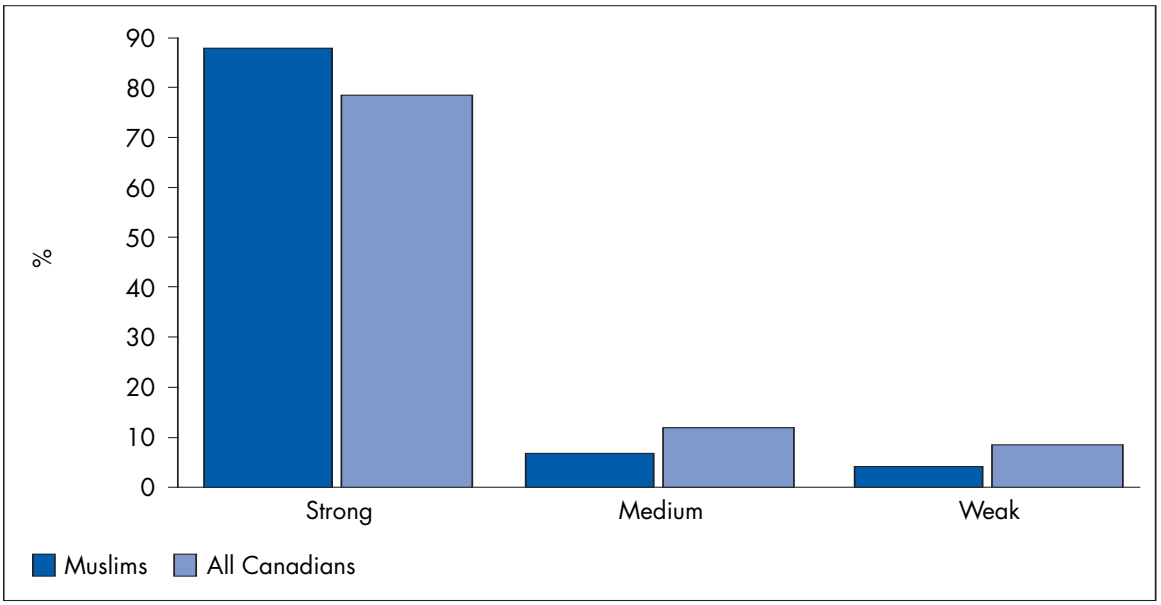
have to interact. While they are open to other groups in all situations, with respect to Muslims they are withdrawn, particularly when the interaction concerns close social ties or positions that carry substantial responsibility and power. For example, they are at ease working with a Muslim female or male supervisor at work, or having Muslims teach their children at school, but a non-Muslim boss or teacher would be preferable.

Finally, the aftermath of 9/11 had a big impact on crime rate against Muslims. Hate offences targeting them because of their religion jumped. More than two-thirds of the rise in crimes motivated by religious hatred reported by Toronto police in 2001 was directed against Muslims. Muslim organizations contend that the actual situation is worse. One half of the victims of hate crimes in Canada do not report them to the police, and estimates for Muslims, in particular the females, are said to be much higher. In spite of the limelight on Muslims since September 2001 Muslim organizations were not engaged in consultations leading up to the launch of the federal government initiative to develop a national system of information on hate crime.

4.2. SENSE OF BELONGING

In spite of the negative experiences, Muslim women's conviction that the core values, embodied in the Charter and expressed in the multicultural policy, will prevail is firm. Canada's culture of respect for differences is particularly appealing as findings of the Muslim Women's Needs Survey reveal that Muslim females embrace this virtue wholeheartedly. Rebuking the notion of a sense of estrangement, a vast majority said that they felt a strong sense of belonging to Canada (Chart 10), and the strength of attachment to the country exceeded the bond to their community and links with the country of origin. A Statistics Canada survey that covered all Canadians and visible minorities also found that Muslims ranked very high in terms of a strong sense of belonging to the country (see Chart 10). This finding is further supported by research currently under way into the attitudes of second generation Muslims which has concluded that they are highly attuned to Canadian values. In particular, they are quick to embrace this country's greatest virtue namely its respect for differences.

Chart 10: Sense of belonging to Canada, distribution of respondents by strength



Source: CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey and Statistics Canada, Ethnic Diversity Survey

Canada's culture of respect for differences – often expressed in the common phrase 'Canada is a work in progress' – has at its core the idea that Canada is not afraid to evolve, to re-imagining itself. Muslim women affirm their participation in this evolution. Respondents to our Survey expressed a strong preference for a Canadian Muslim identity over their own heritage. An overwhelming majority said that they would like their children to grow up as Canadians blending their parents' heritage with their Canadian culture, delivering a sharp rebuke to those who take shots at the cultural mosaic based on a small minority of Muslim proponents of the 'cloister model'.[35]

Evidence from the citizenship statistics corroborates the strong bond revealed by the surveys. Immigrants from Muslim countries apply for Canadian citizenship almost as soon as they have completed their residency requirements in Canada. By comparison, immigrants from Western European countries take twice as long.

4.3. SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

The lack of social capital built by the community is obvious in the low levels of social activity and the concentration of activities around religious events. One in three Muslim women reported being a member of an organization or participating in group activities, which is half the activity level of all Canadians. They are also less engaged than other visible minorities, and rank the last among faith communities.

Given the importance attached to religion, it is not surprising that joining gatherings of a religious nature is the most common type of activity. Most of them revolve around the mosque or are organized by local Muslim associations. The earliest mosques used to serve a wide range of needs. Over time, however, their role has become limited to worship and classes for children in religious teaching.

The focus of group activities on religion also reflects a serious lack of non-religious institutions. Whatever little recreational or sports facilities exist are part of a complex in which a worship hall is the central feature, and recreational facilities often have to give way when congregations grow and need more space.

As mosques are mainly a male institution in Canada, access to women is limited. The women are not only left without any social or cultural support system, their role and participation in the only Muslim institution is severely restricted either as a deliberate decision of the male-dominated administrations or by crowding them out. There are rumblings of change, but it will take a while before the struggle between those advocating the return of Islamic tradition in the mosque and those entrenched in defence of cultural conventions is resolved. Currently, demographics of Muslim males in general and of congregants in many mosques are in favour of those who support the status quo, but women are making inroads at least in some mosques.

Participation in ethno-cultural organizations also plays an important part in their pattern of socialization. These organizations play a big role in the preservation of identity in the early stages of the settlement, as they serve not only as gathering places but also as venues for religious events. Such facilities were – and still are – often rented and rarely become established as permanent facilities in the Muslim community. However, they remain an important source of social networking – often much more than the mosque – and offer opportunities for engagement beyond the religious community.

Interaction with the broader society, as captured through this indicator, is rather limited. Muslim women reported holding membership in certain mainstream organizations, notably labour unions and professional organizations. However, these organizations are, unique in that their membership is generally a requirement.

4.4. SOCIAL CONTACTS

Social networks are an essential and necessary part of human life. One's first contact is the family and close friends. People also engage in activities of a social nature at the workplace. There are neighbourhood

[35] Hamdani, *The Ummah in Canada* … op. cit.

organizations which provide opportunities to form social contacts. People engage in conversations with acquaintances on the street and sometimes strike up conversations with strangers in shopping malls and public transit. Membership in social networks provides many benefits to individuals such as emotional support and information. Networks are also pivotal to community cohesiveness.

The type of networks the people form tell a good deal about their engagement in the broader society and how well adjusted they are in the new social, cultural, economic and political environment. For newcomers into a society, opportunities for networking are limited. Opportunities that exist mainly come through ethnic, religious, cultural and community organizations. These opportunities are more limited for Muslims and women in particular because of a lack of social capital built by the community relative to other groups, and the institutions that exist are less accessible to women than men. The Muslim Women's Needs Survey developed some indicators to capture the degree of Muslim females' social engagement in the broader society.

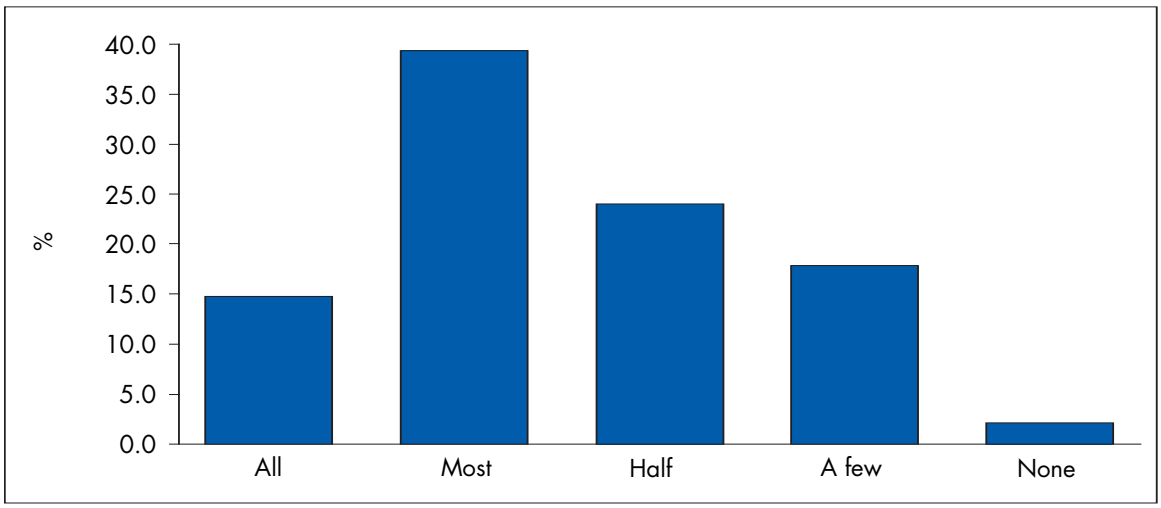
A majority of Muslim women depend on fellow Muslims for emotional support and friendship. Close to 16% said that they had no non-Muslim friends, and 38% reported that most of their friends were Muslim. About one-quarter maintained a balance, and for one-fifth of the respondents the circle of friends was primarily non-Muslim.

There are wide variations in the type of company they keep across the demographic and geographical characteristics. For example, young women in school or university have a wider circle of friends. Similarly, those living in smaller cities are more likely to have more friends of different religious denominations than those in larger cities.

The Survey tried to capture a sense of their involvement in their neighbourhoods. Just over 10% of the respondents said that they knew most of their neighbours. Close to one-third claimed to know many of them. The majority, however, knew a few while 4% were isolated from their neighbourhoods and reported that they did not know any of their neighbours.

Contacts are easier to form in some neighbourhoods than others and also depend upon how long one has lived in a neighbourhood and how often one moves. For example, there are more opportunities in neighbourhoods that are socially more active and organize

Chart 11: Circle of friends that is Muslim (%)



Source: CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005

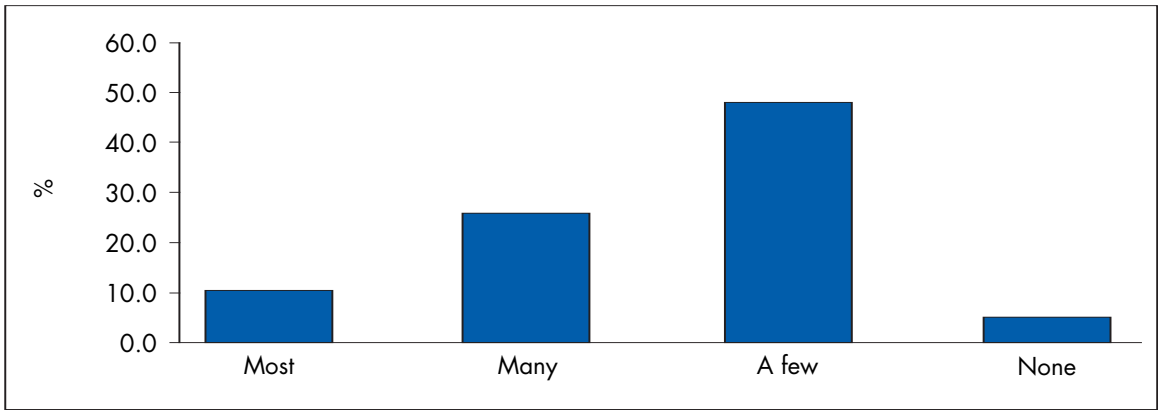
social events such as family days or hold community meetings, etc. Approaching others also becomes easier in neighbourhoods where there are more people who share the same culture, beliefs, etc.

4.5. NEEDS

Discrimination is approached as a social issue and as a criminal justice issue. This distinction is necessary because measures required to address the two are different in nature. Dealing with discrimination as a social issue calls for educational programs while criminal justice requires enforcement of acceptable norms of human behaviour. Punishing unlawful behaviour can achieve what is feasible; the ultimate goal of a civil society is to change attitudes. In this respect, there are two urgent needs: to help improve the quality of information law enforcement agencies use as the basis for planning; and to re-brand the community. Specifics include:

- Improving the quality of information. Compiling a systematic record of hate crimes –motivated by gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. – is a new endeavour in the country. It is well known that females are less likely than males to report crimes to police, and Muslim females are less likely to do so than others. Statistics Canada report on hate crime and discrimination following 9/11 made some interesting points: (a) the aftermath of 9/11 was a blip as far as the statistics go; and (b) the Hindus are the most worried that they will be the victimized. No Muslim organization was represented on consultations leading up to the design and development of the survey. There is an urgent need to gather relevant statistics and help law enforcement agencies in gathering information and interpreting it. Among other things, it is urgent to start a database which would allow the community to compile annual or quarterly information, consistent with definitions in the Charter and those used by law enforcement and statistical agencies.
- Re-brand the community. New packaging is needed. Produce brochures and short videos that emphasize values and things that are dear to all Canadians such as quality of life, multiculturalism and the beauty of the landscape. Show how Muslim women uphold those values and contribute to Canadian society as artists, teachers, public servants, community builders. The contributions of pioneer Muslim women who helped build this nation like Agnes Love, Hannah Hunt, Martha Simons, who were here before Confederation, need to be highlighted.

Chart 12: How many of your neighbours do you know?



Source: CCMW, Muslim Women's Needs Survey 2005

- Involve mosques and Islamic centres in the task of community building. It will not be easy but it needs to be done. Building mosques is the only investment the community has made for its future. Mosques should become the gathering places they were meant to be and as they were throughout the glorious period of Muslim history. Mosques should be places where men and women come to worship and to discuss and solve community problems. And indeed the first mosque in Canada, Al-Rashid was in the beginning such a place.
  - Select a women-friendly mosque and make it a model of what a mosque should be;
  - Seek the help of enlightened, 'women-friendly males' with influence in the community

5. Concluding remarks

Integration is a broad subject. This report focused on three of its most important aspects: political participation, economic integration and social engagement.

Muslim women face numerous and difficult issues in the process of integration. They deal with gender bias, racial discrimination and anti-Muslim sentiment. They have to cope with enormous technological and social changes without guidance from precedents and the well thought out opinions of knowledgeable people. There are other challenges as well, including their role in religious institutions, balancing a career with the household work, struggling to raise family as a lone parent, making ends meet as a senior citizen, just to name a few.

The difficulties have not lessened over time; on the contrary, they appear to have been compounded. Opinion polls show that discrimination has declined as a whole but the anti-Muslim sentiment is on the rise. Muslim women immigrating in the 1990s are economically worse-off than those arriving in the earlier years, and, contrary to conventional wisdom, Canadian-born Muslim women are not better-off than their immigrant mothers. The incidence of unemployment is more than double the national rate and greater than that borne by any other faith community of a similar size, even though they offer a greater potential to fill an important gap in Canada's competitiveness in the knowledge economy.

At the same time, there is hardly any social and cultural support system of the Muslim community to which they can turn to for support and guidance. Indeed, the only well-established institution in the country, the mosque, restricts access to them.

Purely based on statistics, it would be too simplistic to say that the Muslim women are pulling away from traditional political processes or are less involved in civic and social activities because they are apathetic or less caring about the people and communities around them. The statistical facts are essential to alert community leaders and policy makers to the need for appropriate programs, but an understanding of the attitudes is also required to find innovative ways to engage and involve them.

Rather than feeling intimidated or retreating, Muslim women have gained a new vitality. It is sometimes obvious and at other times subtle; sometimes it manifests itself in their activities and in other instances it is discernible in their attitude. They are getting more organized and asserting themselves. They are breaking the mould and rising to positions of leadership. As a result, there are rumblings of change within the community including the institutions. It is because of the initiatives taken by the women that Muslim Canadians are publicly debating topics still taboo in Muslim societies. They have become the leading force behind the thrust to forge a Canadian Muslim identity and be fully engaged in the broader society.

Undeterred by discrimination and other difficulties, Muslim women are firm in their conviction that the core values, embodied in the Charter, will prevail. An overwhelming majority of respondents to the Muslim Women's Needs Survey affirmed their strong attachment to the country and said that this bond was stronger than ties to their community. Expressing their admiration for multiculturalism and its virtues as a binding force in the country, they said that they would like their children to grow up blending their religious heritage with their Canadian culture. Even as they have become more vulnerable to discrimination after 9/11, however, more are motivated to volunteer in not-for-profit organizations – Muslim and other – than before, according to the results of the Survey. While a majority of them abstained from voting in the 2004 election, an overwhelming majority also said that they regarded voting as a civic duty – so important that the imprimatur of a religious authority – such as imams' exhortations that voting was a religious duty – was not needed to impress its importance.

These findings underscore Muslim women's desire to be involved and make a difference but they are not finding appropriate opportunities or guidance to do so. The lack of organization and resources is largely responsible. One would be hard pressed to find another community of similar size, with such deep roots and long history, which pre-dates the Canadian Confederation, with so little social capital.

These results emphasize the need to reach out to Muslim women and to help them develop the knowledge and tools to find their rightful place as full partners in a Canadian pluralist society. Specific measures designed to suit them and innovative forms of engagement are needed.

Companion Report

While the results of the Muslim Women's Needs Assessment Survey (henceforth known as the Survey), supported by other pertinent research, are discussed in the main report, this Companion Report is based on focus-group discussions with Muslim women held from November 2005 through January 2006. Focus groups were organized in Toronto, Calgary, Halifax, Ottawa and Montreal; participants from surrounding communities also attended. The focus group held in Ottawa was bilingual, and two separate focus groups, one in English and one in French, were held in Montreal. In total, 96 women of various ethnicities, occupations and ages from across the country participated in the discussions.

Focus-group discussions further explored issues covered in the Survey and gauged the attitudes and aspirations of Canadian Muslim women and the challenges facing them. The questions were divided into five sections: challenges facing Muslim women; political and civic participation; involvement in religious institutions; labour-force participation; and social engagement. For the purpose of this report, the categories have been narrowed down to 1) Political and Civic Participation, 2) Economic Integration 3) Social Engagement and 4) Challenges within Muslim Communities. (See Appendix I for sample of survey questionnaire and Appendix II for a sample of focus-group questions.)

The following summary of the focus-group discussions supplements the findings contained in the main report. Solutions are proposed at the end of each section. Any errors or omissions in the Companion Report are the sole responsibility of CCMW.

1. POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

There were differences between the Survey respondents and the focus-group participants regarding participation and involvement in the political process. According to the Survey, the majority of Muslim women are not politically involved or aware. Involvement in party politics is limited, and very few Muslim women hold memberships in political parties, seek nomination or run for office. In the focus groups, however, nearly all the women eligible to vote had voted in the previous general election and were planning to vote in the January 2006 election; at least one or two women at every focus group consistently indicated that they belonged to a political party.

While focus-group participants were politically active, they did note that Muslim women were generally apathetic towards political and civic participation. This perception complements the findings of the Survey that the second most common reason for not voting is a lack of interest in the entire political process. The most common reason for not voting is related to personal and administrative factors.

Focus-group participants noted another reason for the lack of political and civic involvement: politicians do not address issues of importance and relevance to Muslim women. However, this is a vicious circle, because politicians will cater to and be primarily involved with communities that have high voter turnout rates. Thus the low voter turnout of the Muslim communities marginalizes Muslim women further.

Other reasons highlighted by focus-group participants included:

- Muslim women who are immigrants are not used to voting or being politically involved or active in their countries of origin and are not familiar with politics or the political process. They also lack knowledge about the political system and their rights and duties.
- The "political material" available is primarily in English, a language the majority of the women are not fluent in or comfortable with.
- Currently one of the main ways politicians reach out to the Muslim communities is through the mosques. However, this leaves out many women,

since they do not go to the mosques because they feel crowded out or unwelcome.

- Many don't see Canada as home, and the myth of return is very much a living reality. This perception contradicts the findings of the Survey, which indicated that respondents have a strong attachment to Canada. The focus group observation, on the other hand, is the participants' perception of some Muslim women.
- Many are suspicious of politicians because of their "crooked" ways. This sceptical attitude towards politics and politicians is rooted in the mistrust of politicians back home.

The participants cited many reasons for Muslim women not running for office. These include:

- It is difficult for Muslim women to be in politics, since there are conflicting views as to what exactly a Muslim woman is. The conservative clergy believe that Muslim women should not raise their voices, yet the demands of a political career are otherwise. Politicians need to realize how a politically active Muslim woman will be perceived by some Muslim communities, even if she has the support of other Muslim women. Also, supporters of Muslim women candidates would be perceived as "guilty by association."
- Muslim candidates, women in particular, are seen as token candidates. At times, Muslim candidates feel torn between the values of their party and their religious and cultural values. For example, the NDP and the same-sex marriage issue. How do candidates reconcile party positions and religious values?
- If there is a Muslim woman candidate, she will not get the support of all the Muslim communities, since there is a lot of jealousy and discrimination within the communities.
- Women do not have the backing of the men.
- There are no resources to support a Muslim woman candidate.
- There are so many other priorities that political involvement is not at the top of the list for Muslim women.

Proposed Solutions

- The federal and provincial governments need to provide education on different levels of government, civics and citizenship, and stress the importance and benefits of voting and participating in the political process.
- Collaborate with different organizations to engage and train more Muslim women to participate in politics.
- Parents should involve children in discussions about issues concerning them as both Canadians and Muslims.
- Candidates need to reach Muslim women in venues other than mosques, as Muslim women are often not welcome at or are crowded out of most mosques.
- Invite candidates and local politicians to political, social and cultural events; provide a platform for politicians and candidates to communicate and exchange ideas with Muslim women.
- Politicians should also take the initiative and organize meetings in town halls, schools and social-service agencies to deal with issues of interest to women and their families. In order to attract more women and make it easier for them to attend, free child care should be provided at the meetings, and they should be held at a time convenient for women.
- Women need to lobby for more time off work to vote and for transportation if necessary.
- Politicians and political parties need to bridge the chasm by visiting different ethnic communities and communicating with them in a language they understand.

2. ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Despite their high level of education, Muslim women continue to be underemployed, unemployed or absent from the labour market altogether. The Survey results paint a bleak picture of Muslim women's economic conditions, and more Muslim women are below the low-income cut-off (LICO) than all other women in Canada. Barriers to employment identified in the Survey include a lack of proficiency in English and French, employers raising educational requirements and a lack of recognition of internationally trained job candidates. Gender, religious and racial discrimination, especially against women in Islamic dress, was also identified as a barrier.

The following is a summary of barriers identified by the focus groups:

- Racism, discrimination and stereotyping on the basis of one's name, skin colour, accent, dress, etc. Many employers are hesitant to hire Muslims in general and specifically Muslim women wearing headscarves. While sales clerks and cashiers wearing headscarves are sometimes seen in the retail sector, promotion into senior level positions is rare for women wearing any form of Muslim dress. It is also easy to identify and rule out Muslim job applicants because of their names. One participant related how she had difficulty getting a job until she anglicized her name on her CV.
- Another participant shared the story of a female dentist who, because she wore a *hijab*, had problems getting patients and also had the tires of her car slashed. Employers have been known to ask women not wear their headscarves while at work. As a result, many Muslim women opt not to enter the labour force, thinking that they will be asked to dress in a particular manner. It was noted that in the education sector the *hijab* does not pose much of a challenge.
- The system does not support women in the workforce: there is a lack of good-quality, affordable, regulated child care, and waiting lists are too long.
- While there are those who believe that Muslim women should stay at home, there are others who genuinely prefer to stay at home. It is a choice, and it is their right to make that choice.
- Participants in the Montreal focus group identified lack of fluency in French as a barrier.
- Women tend to take on second-tier positions so that they can fulfill other responsibilities in the home. In some cases, they are underemployed by choice.
- For those whose credentials are not recognized and who must retrain to practice their professions, retraining is often not an option because of family and other commitments, so they opt to work in low-paying jobs.

Proposed Solutions

- Join forces with organizations that are lobbying the appropriate authorities to address the issues of internationally trained individuals.
- Advocate for universal, affordable child care.
- Advocate for English-language skills development directly related to employment.
- Advocate for specialized staff at employment centres to serve recent immigrants.
- Government should provide more outreach and easier access to government services and support for small businesses.
- Government should initiate micro credit programs for small enterprises, such as the Bangladeshi program for women entrepreneurs.
- Government and private sector should promote and implement employment and internship programs such as Career Bridge to encourage employers to hire recent immigrants.
- Undertake research in collaboration with government and community organizations to determine why second-generation immigrants are not faring better than their parents in the labour market.

- Develop materials and tools to educate employers about Muslim women and their potential as highly qualified candidates, and to counter stereotyping and discrimination in the workplace.
- Develop best-practice guidelines on religious and cultural accommodation of Muslim women in the workplace.
- Consider participating in diversity-focused job fairs.
- Submit articles to diversity and human-resources related publications.
- Encourage employers to include Muslim women as mentors and protégés in their mentoring programs.

3. SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Generally, Muslims are less likely to participate in the larger Canadian society, and there is little engagement with Canadians; this observation was borne out by the results of the Survey, in which 16% had no non-Muslim friends and 38% indicated that most of their friends were Muslim. With fewer Muslim women in the public sphere participating in all aspects of Canadian life, the full integration of Muslim women will remain an unattainable goal for government policy makers and the Muslim communities.

The discussion in the focus groups regarding challenges to social integration can be divided into three broad categories: self-segregation; media stereotyping, racism and gender discrimination in mainstream Canada; and issues around social integration and youth, specifically young girls.

Self-segregation

- A strict adherence to cultural values and a narrow interpretation of religion prevent some women from shedding traditional gender roles and other traditional ways of living assigned by their native cultures. These women self-segregate out of fear of exposing themselves and their children to Canadian society, and they limit themselves to the confines of their respective ethnic communities. Not only are women and young people isolated, but there is also a growing concern around the isolation of seniors.
- Further hurdles to social integration that focus-group participants pointed out are the attitudes and perceptions of Muslim women about themselves. Muslim women also create and promote stereotypes of Muslim women in terms of what defines a good mother, daughter, daughter-in-law and wife. One participant shared a situation about a woman who advised her daughter not to work after marriage because her husband would forgo his responsibility as breadwinner.
- The reasons for this self-segregation may also be attributed to the perceived hostility towards Islam and Muslims in the broader society.

Media stereotyping, racism and gender discrimination in mainstream Canada

- There continue to be assumptions about and stereotyping of Muslim women in the media. After 9/11, all Muslims are perceived as terrorists and rabid militants. The media are not interested in presenting the daily lives of ordinary Muslims — the focus remains on Muslims in crisis.
- Others raised the point that people — Muslim and non-Muslim alike — believe that women who wear the *hijab* are somehow oppressed, have been forced to wear it and have no will of their own. For many women, wearing the *hijab* is a conscious choice.
- Discrimination is now more systemic and subtle, and some women do not recognize that it is discrimination. We need better reporting of incidents of racism and discrimination. Unfortunately, with the new security laws in place, Muslims are more reluctant than ever to divulge any personal information to the authorities, including perceived or real incidences of discrimination.

Issues around youth (specifically young girls) and social integration

- Children are under pressure from parents to perform academically and also under peer pressure to adapt to their new surroundings.
- Muslim youth are becoming more isolated and disenfranchised for various reasons, including overall disillusionment about how Muslims and Islam are perceived in the media and in Canadian society.
- Since parents are unwilling to adapt to their surroundings and are living in a cocoon, there is not only a generational but also a cultural gap between the children and their parents. The parents want to teach the children according to what they have experienced and learned, but the experiences of the younger generation, since they have been born or brought up in Canada, are very different from those of their parents.
- Young women are being drawn to more conservative, traditional interpretations of Islam through organizations on university and college campuses.
- Mosques are not very receptive or welcoming to young people, and children are thus not inclined to go to the mosque. This means that they do not get a chance to meet and befriend other Muslims their age. On the other hand, the children cannot relate to their Canadian friends, since their lifestyles are different. As a result, many children are isolated and conflicted.
- Participants expressed concerns about their children marrying outside the community. There are no venues for young people to meet and connect with one another.
- The older generation often does not acknowledge that Muslim girls are facing the same issues as the male children and youth in general, such as drugs, violence and sex.
- There needs to be a venue or forum in which young people are willing and comfortable enough to discuss problems. There is also a need for a support network of young Muslim women.
- The participants also identified the need for successful Muslim women as role models.

Proposed Solutions

There is also a large majority of women who do want to adapt to their surroundings. Respondents to the Survey overwhelmingly indicated their commitment to the core values of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and their strong sense of belonging to Canada. Their strength of attachment to this country supersedes their bond to their community and links with their country of origin. This provides a tremendous opportunity to engage and empower the women in assuming more active roles within the broader society.

- Women need to become involved, for example, in interacting with other parents and children in the playground, volunteering at the children's schools and other social and civic activities that enrich people's lives.
- Determine appropriate means for outreach to women who are hard to reach to engage them in civic life.
- Develop pilot projects in collaboration with schools and community organizations to focus on engaging youth in the broader Canadian society.
- Submit articles in ethnic media; develop public-service announcements and ads on ethnic TV shows, as these are watched by women.
- Continue to work with the media; submit op-ed pieces and invite the media to events and provide leads for features and stories.
- Work with mainstream organizations to build bridges.
- Federal and provincial governments should organize civics classes for new immigrants such as the 600 hours of classes recently implemented in Germany.

- Initiate a pilot project to establish a women-focused virtual as well as physical centre for learning and for cultural, social and spiritual interaction with a view to engaging both Muslims and non-Muslims; invite progressive Islamic academics and theologians.
- Develop a database of Muslim/Islamic feminist theologians.
- Outreach to elementary and secondary schools to connect with mothers and engage them in dialogue on the importance of social and cultural engagement.
- Promote materials, especially media-relations tools and publications designed to educate both Muslims and non-Muslims about Muslim women and Islam.
- It is important to say who you are and what you believe in and to talk to people and explain to them what Islam is all about. There is a responsibility on all Muslims to educate others about Islam and dispel myths about Muslim women.
- Seek out opportunities to engage with the broader society and its social and cultural activities.
- Join movements and activities that foster positive relationships with other members of Canadian society, for example, walks and runs for good causes, environmental cleanup, neighbourhood associations, etc.

4. CHALLENGES WITHIN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Although the participants identified many challenges facing them in mainstream Canadian society, it was the challenges within Muslim communities that prompted the most passionate discussions. The following observations provide interesting insights into the state of affairs within Muslim communities.

Challenges within Muslim communities identified by participants include:

- Fragmentation and discrimination within Muslim communities based on class, ethnicity, race, nationality of origin, dress, language, etc., are prevalent. Five women at one of the regional meetings had experienced discrimination from mainstream Canadian society; on the other hand, 14 women had experienced discrimination within Muslim communities. Some stated that there is a lack of unity within the communities, and issues are not dealt with as "Muslim issues" but as "Somali issues," "South Asian issues," "Arab issues," and so on. Further evidence of ethnic and racial splintering is demonstrated by the fact that mosques are established to cater to specific ethnicities and sects. There is a need for intra-faith and cross-cultural events to counter the fragmentation and isolation.
- Alongside this fragmentation, the communities are becoming more dogmatic and traditional in their thinking. Not surprisingly, Muslim women are the ones who bear the brunt of this regression in terms of their mobility, their role within the family, and so on. Many participants in the focus groups shared anecdotes about how their mosques had evolved from being non-segregated, welcoming community centres to completely segregated (male/female) institutions.
- Gender discrimination is common within Muslim communities, specifically within religious institutions. Imams have been known to give flagrant anti-women sermons, and the majority of the mosques are not hospitable to women.
- Not only are there misconceptions about Islam in the non-Muslim world, even within Muslim communities, there is a lot of confusion, lack of knowledge and lack of consensus about Islam.

- Often, those working for the empowerment of women are seen as troublemakers within Muslim communities. However, the work of raising awareness regarding Muslims and Islam must be continued. Specifically, work needs to be done with settlement workers, community-service providers, front-line workers, etc. This will create grassroots awareness.

Proposed Solutions

- The regression to a dogmatic view of Islam is of serious concern to CCMW, because it isolates Muslim women. CCMW is in the process of doing community research on this issue.
- Many different Muslim groups are trying to define and portray an image of Muslims as they see fit. Muslims are not homogeneous, and no single Muslim group is truly representative of the face of Islam. It is important to convey to Muslims and non-Muslims that assumptions and stereotyping based on any one view of Islam and Muslims is counterproductive. This does not mean that on important issues Canadian Muslims cannot speak in solidarity, a solidarity that also needs to represent all the diversity of Muslims in Canada, including the voices of women and young people.
- It is important for mosques in developing their identity to be "neighbourhood" mosques and not be perceived as places for specific religious or ethnic groups.
- Women should not stop going to the mosque, whether out of disgust, disappointment or a sense of disconnection. Women should go regularly, stand up, speak out and assert themselves.
- There is a need for inter- and intra-faith dialogue, and young people need to be in the forefront of such efforts.

Appendix I

MUSLIM WOMEN'S NEEDS SURVEY, 2005

GENERAL

1. Please enter the name of the city where you live _____

2. Enter the FIRST THREE DIGITS of your postal code _____

A. PARTICIPATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

1. In the last FIVE YEARS, did you ever vote in a

a.	Federal election	Yes ❍	No ❍
b.	Provincial election	Yes ❍	No ❍
c.	Municipal or local election	Yes ❍	No ❍

2. If you did not vote in the 2004 federal election, what was the main reason?

a.	I did not care, I was not interested	❍
b.	I was not aware that it was the last day to vote	❍
c.	I did not know where to vote	❍
d.	My name was not on the voters list	❍
e.	I did not know I was eligible to vote	❍
f.	I was ill or out of town	❍
g.	My vote was meaningless as I knew which party would win	❍
h.	I did not like any of the candidates or political parties	❍
i.	I was too busy with family or business or work	❍
j.	I did not have transportation to go to the polling station	❍
k.	I think voting in Canadian elections is un-Islamic	❍
l.	Candidates or parties did not raise issues of my interest	❍
m.	I do not trust politicians	❍
n.	Other. Please specify _____	❍

3. In the last 12 MONTHS, did you ever: (Please check as many as apply)

a.	Participate in a demonstration or rally for any cause	❍
b.	Take part in a boycott	❍
c.	Sign a petition	❍
d.	Write a letter or article in a newspaper (including those not published)	❍
e.	Appear in a radio or TV program to discuss an issue	❍

f. Write or telephone your federal, provincial or municipal representative ❍

g. None of the above activities ❍

4. In the 2004 federal election, how much chance was there that your vote would make a difference in *deciding the winning candidate in your riding*?

Good ❍ Some ❍ None ❍

5. How often do your family, friends or people with whom you associate discuss current world and Canadian events?

Often ❍

Sometime ❍

Rarely ❍

Not at All ❍

6. If you were asked, could you name your

a. Member of federal parliament Yes ❍ No ❍

b. Member of provincial parliament Yes ❍ No ❍

c. City councillor Yes ❍ No ❍

7. Do you think by voting Muslims strengthen the voice of their community in Canada?

Yes ❍ No ❍ Maybe ❍

8. Which of the following statements is closest to your views?

a. Voting is the *religious and civic duty* of Muslim Canadians ❍

b. Voting is the *civic duty* of Muslim Canadians ❍

c. Voting is *a choice*, not a duty ❍

9. How important were the following to you in the 2004 federal election as a source of information about candidates, their positions, etc. Rank each source, using a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 IS VERY IMPORTANT and 5 IS NOT IMPORTANT AT ALL.

a. Internet (exclude Muslim web sites and e-mails from Muslim organizations)
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

b. TV, radio and newspapers
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

c. Muslim organizations (including their web sites and e-mails)
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

d. Visits to Islamic centres (mosques, *imambargah*, *jamatkhana*)
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

e. Material sent by political parties
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

f. A male member of your family
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

g. Participation in political meetings
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

10. Do you intend to vote in the next:

a. Federal election
Yes ❍ No ❍ Maybe ❍

b. Provincial election
Yes ❍ No ❍ Maybe ❍

c. Municipal election
Yes ❍ No ❍ Maybe ❍

11. Were you eligible to vote in the 2004 federal election?
(Note: Canadian citizens age 18 years and over at the time of election can vote)
Yes ❍ No ❍

B. DISCRIMINATION AND UNFAIR TREATMENT

1. In the last five years, do you feel that you have experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly by others in Canada because of your ethnicity, culture, race, skin colour, accent or religion?
(Note: Discrimination may happen when people are treated unfairly because they are seen as being different from others)
Yes ❍ No ❍

2. How often did you experience such discrimination or unfair treatment?
Often ❍ Sometimes ❍ Rarely ❍

3. For which reason or reasons do you feel that you have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment? PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT ARE APPLICABLE. Was it because of:

a. Your ethnicity ❍
b. Your race or skin colour ❍
c. Your language or accent ❍
d. Your religion ❍
e. Your gender ❍

4. In which place or situation did you experience discrimination or unfair treatment?
PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT ARE APPLICABLE. Was it:

a. At work ❍
b. When applying for a job ❍
c. When applying for a promotion ❍
d. On the street ❍
e. In a store, bank or restaurant ❍
f. When dealing with the police or courts ❍
g. Somewhere else. ❍ Please specify _____

5. **Have you personally experienced a change in discrimination or unfair treatment over the last five years? Has it:**
   Increased ❍ Decreased ❍ Remained more or less unchanged ❍

6. **In the last five years, have any crimes been committed against you in Canada? (Crimes include offences such as theft, robbery, assault, sexual assault, break and entry, fraud, and vandalism. (Please include it in your response even if you did not report it to the police).**
   Yes ❍ No ❍

7. **Do you believe that any of the crimes committed against you in the last five years could be considered a hate crime? (Note: Hate crimes are defined as crimes motivated by the offender's bias, prejudice or hate based on the victim's race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or any other similar factor.**
   Yes ❍ No ❍

8. **Do you believe that this crime was committed against you because of:**
   a. Your ethnicity or culture ❍
   b. Your race or skin colour ❍
   c. Your language or accent ❍
   d. Your religion ❍
   e. Or for some other reason ❍ Please specify _____

C. SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

1. **Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = VERY STRONG AND 5 = NOT STRONG at all, how would you describe your sense of belonging to your:**
   a. Neighbourhood where you live
      1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍
   b. Your ethnic or cultural group
      1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍
   c. Your religious group
      1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍
   d. Canada
      1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍
   e. Country of your origin or ancestors
      1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

2. **How many of your close friends would you say are Muslims**
   a. All of them ❍
   b. Most of them ❍
   c. About half of them ❍
   d. A few of them ❍
   e. None of them ❍

3. Do your parents or parents-in-law live with you?

Yes ❍ No ❍

4. If your parents or parents-in-law do not live with you, do they live elsewhere in Canada?

Yes ❍ No ❍

5. In the LAST THREE MONTHS, how many new people did you meet outside of work or school, you intend to stay in contact with?

a. More than five ❍

b. Fewer than five ❍

c. None ❍

6. Would you say that you know:

a. Most of the people in your neighbourhood? ❍

b. Many of the people in your neighbourhood? ❍

c. A few of the people in your neighbourhood? ❍

d. Nobody else in your neighbourhood? ❍

7. How often do you go to an Islamic centre (mosque, imambargah, jamatkhana, etc).

a. At least once a week ❍

b. At least once a month ❍

c. At least 3 times a year ❍

d. Once or twice a year ❍

e. Not applicable (N/A) ❍

8. How often does your Islamic centre (mosque, imambargah, jamatkhana, etc) offer or organize activities of social or recreational nature for the YOUTH.

a. At least once a week ❍

b. At least once a month ❍

c. At least 3 times a year ❍

d. Once or twice a year ❍

e. None at all ❍

f. Don't know ❍

9. How often does your Islamic centre (mosque, imambargah, jamatkhana, etc) offer or organize any activities of social or recreational nature for the SENIORS.

a. At least once a week ❍

b. At least once a month ❍

c. At least 3 times a year ❍

d. Once or twice a year ❍

e. None at all ❍

f. Don't know ❍

10. How important is it, in order to create a community spirit among Muslims, that Islamic centres (mosques, *imambargahs*, *jamatkhanas*, *etc*) make all people feel welcome?

Very important ❍ Important ❍ Not important ❍

11. How welcome do you feel at your Islamic centre (mosque, *imambargah*, *jamatkhana*)

Very welcome ❍ Welcome ❍ Not welcome ❍

12. How adequate are the facilities in your Islamic centre (mosque, imambargah, jamatkhana, etc) for young people of both sexes to interact to facilitate a relationship leading to marriage. Use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 IS ADEQUATE and 5 IS NOT ADEQUATE at all

1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

13. Using a scale of 1 to 5, how comfortable or uncomfortable would you feel if your DAUGHTER OR SISTER was going to marry someone: (1 is very comfortable; 5 is very uncomfortable)

a. Who is a Muslim and from the same ethnic group as you
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

b. Who is a Muslim and from a different ethnic group
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

c. Who converts to Islam
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

d. Who is from among the people of the Book
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

e. Who is a non-Muslim (other than among people of the Book)
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

14. Using a scale of 1 to 5, how comfortable or uncomfortable would you feel if your SON OR BROTHER was going to marry someone: (1 is very comfortable; 5 is very uncomfortable)

a. Who is a Muslim and from the same ethnic group as you
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

b. Who is a Muslim and from a different ethnic group
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

c. Who converts to Islam
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

d. Who is from among the people of the Book
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

e. Who is a non-Muslim (other than among people of the Book)
1 ❍ 2 ❍ 3 ❍ 4 ❍ 5 ❍

15. Are you a member of, or do you attend events organized by, any of the following types of organizations? CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY

a. Religion affiliated groups (e.g. interfaith groups) ❍

b. Professional associations including union membership ❍

c. Non-profit, charitable organizations (excluding religion affiliated organizations) ❍

d. Ethnic organizations (excluding religious affiliated groups) ❍

e. Cultural groups (heritage society, genealogical society, film society, dance troupe) ❍

f. Hobby groups (book club, gardening club, stamp collectors association, etc) ❍

g. School, neighbourhood, or community-associated groups (e.g., block parents, alumni association, school volunteer ❍

h. Support groups or social service organizations ❍

i. Political party ❍

j. Other. Please specify _____ ❍

k. I am not a member of any of the above types of organizations ❍

16. How often do you attend meetings organized by the group (s) identified above

Often ❍

Sometimes ❍

Rarely ❍

Not applicable ❍

17. In the last one year, did you do any volunteer work for:

a. Muslim organizations
Yes ❍ No ❍

b. Non-Muslim organizations
Yes ❍ No ❍

18. Do you have children who are of:

a. Pre-school age (under 6 years of age)
Yes ❍ No ❍

b. School age (6 to 18 years old)
Yes ❍ No ❍

19. Please choose ONLY ONE of the following options:

I would like my children:

a. To grow up as Muslim and retain their parents' culture ❍

b. To grow up as Muslim and adopt and adapt good things from both their parents' culture and the Canadian culture ❍

20. In the LAST FIVE YEARS, how has your involvement with non-Muslim organizations such as inter-faith groups, food banks, changed?

Increased ❍ Decreased ❍ Remained the same ❍

21. If your involvement with non-Muslim groups *did not increase*, have you become more or less interested in getting involved?

More interested ❍ Less interested ❍ No change ❍

D. LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

1. Which of the following categories best describes your current employment status:

a. Working full-time (35 hours or more a week) ❍
b. Working part-time (working less than 35 hours a week) ❍
c. Self-employed ❍
d. Holding two jobs or doing more than one shift at the same job ❍
e. On maternity or paternity leave ❍
f. Full-time homemaker ❍
g. Full-time homemaker and attending school ❍
h. Unemployed, looking for work ❍
i. Retired ❍
j. Full-time student ❍
k. Working part-time and attending school ❍

2. If you do not work full-time outside the home and are not looking for a job, what is the main reason:

a. Your family responsibilities keep you busy ❍
b. Your religious beliefs ❍
c. Your volunteer work keeps you occupied ❍
d. You looked for a job for a long time and then gave up ❍
e. Other. Please specify _____ ❍

3. In the last ONE MONTH, who did most of the housework work in your household?

a. You ❍
b. Your spouse ❍
c. Your parents ❍
d. Other relatives ❍
e. Household help ❍
f. You and your spouse share it more or less equally ❍

4. In your experience, what are the main barriers to finding a job that fits your qualifications? Please CHECK THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT BARRIERS.

a. Lack of evaluation and recognition of foreign credentials and experience ❍
b. Proficiency in English ❍
c. Proficiency in French ❍
d. Proficiency in both English and French ❍
e. Lack of knowledge about the Canadian culture ❍
f. Workplace practices ❍
g. Lack of Canadian work experience ❍
h. Racial discrimination ❍

i. Anti-Muslim feeling ❍
j. Union rules and regulations ❍
k. Lack of uniformity in rules between provincial regulatory bodies ❍
l. Employers not fully engaged in hiring immigrants ❍
m. Employers are looking for young people rather than experienced workers ❍
n. Lack of security clearance ❍
o. Lack of recognition for foreign work experience ❍
p. Employers raising the level of education or training required for the position ❍
q. Standardized testing which all applicants for any position must undergo but which is not necessarily related to the skills for the job ❍
r. Employers benefit from under-employing people ❍

5. Where did you obtain your highest degree or certificate

a. Canada ❍
b. United States ❍
c. Germany, France, the U.K. (United Kingdom) ❍
d. Other. Please specify the country_____ ❍

6. Did you upgrade your education and skills since you came to Canada?

Yes ❍ No ❍

7. Are you the only income earner in the family?

Yes ❍ No ❍

8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: *A working mother can establish as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work outside the home.*

Strongly agree ❍
Agree ❍
Disagree ❍
Strongly disagree ❍

9. Please indicate below the occupation in which you are working and the occupation for which you were trained.

a.	Clerk, including sales clerk, salespersons and cashiers	Trained for ❍	Currently working ❍
b.	Clerical and sales supervisor	Trained for ❍	Currently working ❍
c.	Manager	Trained for ❍	Currently working ❍
g.	Teachers and professors	Trained for ❍	Currently working ❍
e.	Scientists and engineers	Trained for ❍	Currently working ❍
f.	Secretaries	Trained for ❍	Currently working ❍
g.	Child care and home support workers	Trained for ❍	Currently working ❍
h.	Administrative positions	Trained for ❍	Currently working ❍
i.	Physicians and surgeons	Trained for ❍	Currently working ❍

j. Nurse supervisors, registered nurses, technologists, etc — Trained for ❍ — Currently working ❍

k. Judges, lawyers, psychologists, social workers — Trained for ❍ — Currently working ❍

l. Chefs and cooks — Trained for ❍ — Currently working ❍

m. Senior management occupations — Trained for ❍ — Currently working ❍

n. Other. Please specify _____ — Trained for ❍ — Currently working ❍

E. SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEMOGRAPHICS

1. In which of following age groups do you fall?

a. Under 18 years ❍

b. 18-24 years ❍

c. 25-34 years ❍

d. 35-44 years ❍

e. 45-54 years ❍

f. 55-64 years ❍

g. 65-74 years ❍

h. 75 years and above ❍

2. Were you born in Canada

Yes ❍ No ❍

3.What is your current marital status:

a. Single (never married) ❍

b. Married ❍

c. Separated ❍

d. Divorced ❍

e. Widowed ❍

f. Other ❍ Please specify _____

4. If you were born outside Canada, when did you come here?

a. Between 2001 and 2005 ❍

b. Between 1996 and 2000 ❍

c. Between 1991 and 1995 ❍

d. Between 1980 and 1990 ❍

e. Before 1980 ❍

5. Are you a Canadian citizen?

Yes ❍ No ❍

6. What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?

a. Some high school ❍

b. Completed high school ❍

c. Completed post secondary — community college, technical college, etc ❍
d. Some university but no degree ❍
e. Bachelor's degree ❍
f. Master's degree (M.A.; M.Sc; M. Phil; M. Litt) ❍
g. Master's degree (profession-specific such as MBA; M.Ed.; LL.M; MBBS, MD, M.Eng.) ❍
h. Doctorate (Ph.D. LL.D., D.Litt., etc.) ❍

7. Please estimate in which of the following groups does your household annual income fall (INCLUDE INCOME FROM ALL SOURCES pension, old age security, salary, children's allowance, dividends, etc. RECEIVED BY ALL PEOPLE IN THE HOUSEHOLD)

a. Less than $10,000 ❍
b. $10,000 - $20,000 ❍
c. $21,000 - $30,000 ❍
d. $31,000 - $40,000 ❍
e. $41,000 - $50,000 ❍
f. $51,000 - $75,000 ❍
g. $76,000 - $100,000 ❍
h. Over $100,000 ❍

8. Which one of the following groups best describes YOUR (excluding all other members of your household) annual income?

a. Less than $10,000 ❍
b. $10,000 - $20,000 ❍
c. $21,000 - $30,000 ❍
d. $31,000 - $40,000 ❍
e. $41,000 - $50,000 ❍
f. $51,000 - $75,000 ❍
g. $76,000 - $100,000 ❍
h. Over $100,000 ❍

9. Have you taken or are you currently taking ESL?

Yes ❍ No ❍

10. Do you have an Internet connection at home?

Yes ❍ No ❍

11. Do you have a Canadian driver's license?

Yes ❍ No ❍

Appendix II

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

GENERAL

1. **As Muslim women, what are the three most pressing challenges/barriers facing us in Canada?**

2. **What can we do to address the three most pressing challenges?**
   a. What can you do as an individual?
   b. What can the Muslim communities do?
   c. What can civil society do?
   d. What can CCMW do?
   e. What can the three different levels of government do?

POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

3. **What is the extent of your involvement in the political process?**
   a. At the federal level?
   b. At the provincial level?
   c. At the municipal level?

If you are not involved, what prevents you from being more involved?

4. **What is the extent of your involvement in your religious institutions (mosque, Islamic centre, *jamaatkhana*, *imambargah*, etc.)?**

5. **If you are not currently involved in your religious institutions, what prevents you from being involved/more involved?**

MUSLIM WOMEN AND DISCRIMINATION

6. **What do you believe to be the reason for the discrimination faced by Muslim women?**

7. **What should be done to address discrimination against Canadian Muslim women?**

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

8. **Who do you socialize with most often?**

10. **If you have children, do they socialize with non-Muslim children? Probe: what is the nature of this interaction?**

11. **How important do you think it is for Canadian Muslim women to interact with non-Muslims?**

12. **What has been your experience as a volunteer outside of the Muslim community?**

13. **Do you attend arts and cultural events? Events not related to your ethnicity or religion?**

14. **What needs to be done to encourage greater participation of Muslim women in their neighbourhoods? In arts, cultural and social activities outside of their faith community? Is this very important to you?**

15. **What are your concerns, if any, if your son/daughter marries outside your faith?**

16. **What if anything, can be done to encourage young Muslim men and women to seek partners within the Muslim community?**

LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

17. **What do you believe to be the three main reasons for Muslim women's lack of labour force participation? Underemployment? Unemployment?**

18. **What can be done to improve the labour market participation of Muslim women in Canada?**

FAMILY

19. **What are the most pressing family challenges facing Canadian Muslim women today?**

20. **What can be done to address these challenges?**

In the winter of 2005-2006, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) undertook a comprehensive assessment of Muslim women's needs across Canada, focusing on the level of Muslim women's civic, political, economic and social engagement. Two key instruments were used for the assessment, a survey questionnaire and focus-group discussions. The survey design and analysis were carried out by Dr. Daood Hamdani, Canada's foremost expert on the Muslim Canadian population. Included in this publication is also a Companion Report, which summarizes issues raised by the focus groups and presents possible solutions. CCMW hopes the findings of the two reports will guide policy development and help social-service providers and governments at all levels to better plan initiatives that enhance Muslim women's full participation, inclusion and integration into Canadian society.

Dr. Daood Hamdani is among the most influential writers on Muslim Canadians and a pioneer in that field of study. He has published numerous articles, including the critically acclaimed entry on Canada in the Encyclopaedia of Muslim Minorities and Islam. His work has been translated into several languages, including French, Spanish, Arabic and Farsi, and is frequently cited in professional journals and doctoral dissertations in legal briefs, in submissions to commissions of inquiry and in the media.

Dr. Hamdani's previous reports for CCMW include *Muslim Women: Beyond the Perceptions; Triple Jeopardy: Muslim Women's Experience of Discrimination*; and *Muslim Women's Civic Participation: From Polling Booths to Parliament.*

We gratefully acknowledge the Department of Canadian Heritage, Multiculturalism and Human Rights Branch for the financial support which made possible the research and publication of this book.

© Canadian Council of Muslim Women, 2006.

ISBN 0-9688621-2-8

P.O. Box 154 Gananoque, ON, K7G 2T7, Canada. Tel: 613 382 2847 E-mail: info@ccmw.com