Amina is an award winning organisation that provides services for Muslim/Minority Ethnic (ME) women from all backgrounds. Women are given the advice, support and services they need to empower them to live better, safer lives, free from discrimination and abuse. We work to ensure that women are supported, enabled to overcome social/economic barriers, develop their skills and given a voice to influence public policy. We deliver national and local initiatives including a national Helpline, engaging women and their families around climate change, employability and volunteering support, Violence against Women campaigning and work around anti Muslim sentiment. Our work is underpinned by the principles of community empowerment and participation.

Amina is committed to ensuring that Muslim and Minority Ethnic (ME) women have an equal chance of accessing employment support and advice. The Inspiring Aspirations, Amina’s employability project has engaged with over 200 women last year to help them overcome barriers to employment or further education. Through this work we have much anecdotal evidence that suggests that this community group are struggling to access the right support and are often on stage 1 or 2 of the employability pipeline.

For the purposes of this consultation Amina ran 2 focus groups in Dundee and Glasgow, with a total of 14 participants and shared an online survey to gauge a response on the questions detailed in the consultation. Fifty seven people responded to the survey with 85% identifying as women, 77% as Muslim and 80% identifying as a ME.

**Employment Support and Advice**

From the survey, 58% had accessed employment support or advice, with most accessing support from Amina or a job centre, followed by online and family members.

Focus group findings highlighted that majority of women were aware of employability services such as Amina, the Job Centre, Citizen’s Advice Bureau and some were aware of Skills Development Scotland.

The most significant issues cited as immobilizing women from seeking employment opportunities were, lack of awareness of how to access jobs/opportunities other than through the aforementioned services; childcare
issues, lack of support from partner to pursue work, language barriers, lack of confidence and lack of work experience.

Most women felt that mainstream services were not meeting the needs of Muslim/ME women, and lacked real understanding of cultural issues affecting this group to progress to positive destinations.

“I want to tell my experience. I went to Job Centre, and there was a man. I tell him, my English not good. I ask him how do you see the jobs? He said, ok there are the computers, go there and check. Somehow I managed to see the jobs, and ok I am interested in this job, a chef job. He said, ok there is a number, call. I called him, I couldn’t hear properly what the man was saying. I couldn’t understand him, but he said no sorry, that’s all we can do. I cannot do anything more than this so you have to. After that I stopped. I didn’t go back”

“The first thing when I start to live here, my language was very bad and no one told where I can go to improve my language. Second, children. I have two children that I can’t put in private nursery. Third thing, my confidence. Until now, I am not confident enough. I was working as a head teacher in my country. When I come here, I feel I am not confident, I am not good enough to work or to do something better in my life, something that make me more happy or more satisfied, I can’t find it here. I compare myself with others, this is my problem. When I compare me to this lady, or other English or British women, oh she is better than me, she speak English, she can use computer very well, so she’s better than me”.

“My husband, he encourage me all the time, but the problem is, I have children. Yeah go do some volunteer, do courses, anything you want, but the problem is, who can sit with your children?”

“I found it a significant challenge to find work from home opportunities that matched my field in the media. As I was looking for work that could be done around other family commitments, I found that there was not much available. I feel that there needs to be more development of jobs for people with caring responsibilities or those that have children but do want to do work but cannot physically attend the office.”

“When it is face to face, I don’t feel you are given honest or open opinions and they don’t help you as much as they should. I feel the image that they have of you and what they have prejudged about you. Whereas on the phone they don’t know you and our accents are quite Scottish anyway, but face to face i feel they hold back on information.”

“I don’t understand as the government is saying go out and work and like all these mother who have been home and their children are now grown up and now go out and work, but these apprenticeships are for young people. Why is there not this for mothers or even fathers who are coming back to work, why is there
not something for their criteria, to help them. I am at that stage where I want to go out and work, but it all boils down to experience; nobody wants to take on a ‘fuddy duddy’ like me.”

“Our culture sometimes the same. The husband have to work outside full time, wife should be in the home. Some men are not ready to share. Like I can do half of the day and you do half. But here, I feel like people may share – ok you do half of the day and I do half, I can look after children some days. But in our culture, men’s mentality is not like that.”

“You, like whites and Scottish, you go college and get degrees and everything. You are much aware of the system, what is going on outside. But we come after finishing or graduating so it is difficult for us – where to go, how to go?”

Amina is relatively new to supporting women in terms of employability and has been working closely with a couple of job centres in the Southside of Glasgow, Skills Development Scotland, Dundee employability initiatives and other third sector agencies to address a gap in service provision.

Earlier this year Amina organised and successfully delivered a speed mentoring event from Muslim/ME women to engage with employability service providers, employers that have under representation of Muslim/ME staff (eg Police) as well as other relevant service providers eg DWP. This model will be replicated for a similar style event to be delivered in Glasgow late autumn.

Recognising social media as a powerful platform for engaging with women, in August we aim to launch our short employability pathways videos of Muslim/BME women to empower other women to pursue their goals and also highlight services that can help.

**Recruitment, Retention and Promotion**

According to recent research by Dr Nabil Khattab of University of Bristol, Muslim women were 71% more likely to be unemployed even when they had the same educational level and language skills.

There is other significant research around the discrimination Muslim and ME communities face in terms of recruitment, retention and promotion, which seems to be growing issue in the current political climate of a steady surge in anti Muslim sentiment. From our survey 35% felt they had been or knew someone that had experienced discrimination because of their ethnicity; followed by race, faith and age. Forty five percent had not reported the discrimination.

The focus group attendees expressed experiences of potential discrimination and felt this was an additional barrier to them having access to equal employment opportunities. There was a general consensus across the focus groups of a ‘feeling’ of potential discrimination due to the hijab or looking, sounding different.
“Ethnicity does come into it, a while back I read about a teacher that was applying for work and he, for over a year, wasn’t even being acknowledged, he then applied again but changed his name to a more English name and got a reply from a school within 7 hours and called for interview. I feel that is racial discrimination.”

“That does happen a lady I know, her daughter recently been applying for work and had no replies and changed her name on an application, next morning she got a phone call.”

“When you go to retail shops or supermarkets you never see older Muslim BME women working there. Or you only see younger people, so when you apply you feel you want get it as they don’t seem to hire people in my age range.”

“I had a job interview lined up through a recruitment agency. The agency worker was going to speak to the employer, then when he got back to me he said that the job was gone, and I just felt that form the tone of his voice something wasn’t right.”

“Sometimes I feel like companies have a particular image and if you don’t fit that image you are less likely to be hired by them. Sometime feel we don’t fit in anywhere.”

Promotion was seen as reserved for those who displayed certain characteristics such as being more sociable or of a particular age, ethnicity.

“My father in law used to work at the petrol pump. He worked there for more than fifteen years and the boss was very happy with his work. The boss said he will soon promote him, but after a few days, they employed a young girl, twenty years old and they promoted the girl to manager. My father in law was so disappointed as his boss said he would be promoted for his honesty, long work and he is really happy. He said he was so disappointed and disheartened, he left. He asked if experience of that long, does that count less than a girl who just started after college or possible university. Could be racism or . . .”

“I feel if you don’t socialise enough you are less likely to be offered promotion as you don’t feel you are part of the ‘team’ as much as someone who can. Promotion should really be work related, but it’s not always the case.”

Employment segregation was seen as a problem in Scotland by 40% of the survey respondents, with a further 38% unsure whether it was. Forty seven percent felt that there were jobs that were unsuitable for Muslim communities, top ranking from a varied list were waiting staff (hospitality), working in finance, and the military service. Forty five percent felt that there were not the same opportunities for progression for Muslim and ME communities as the indigenous community.
Participants from the focus group similarly felt the aforementioned were
unsuitable areas of work, more so for Muslim women. Racism within particular
sectors was deemed as an additional barrier to recruitment or promotion.

“The police force, as with today’s climate and anti-muslim sentiments and racism,
would you really want to be in the front line and be called a ‘terrorist’ and other
names. For a woman more so than a man I think it would be hard.”

“There is a lot of discrimination and racism in social work as well but it doesn’t put
me off.”

**Promoting Positive Action**

Across the survey and focus groups participants were unaware of any measures
being taken to tackle workplace discrimination and segregation. It was seen as a
positive measure if employers had quotas in place to ensure a diverse workforce,
of course based on skill and ability. Also having a strong message about racism,
discrimination with the workplace would be good practice.

“The government should have some sort of policy were big employers should
have a certain percentage of diversity in their staffing. Obviously they should
have the right skills for the job and not just for ticking a box. Employers should
be more accountable for diversity.”

Most participants agreed the employers needed to have faith and cultural training
in order to bring about change which could help with Muslim/ME recruitment.
One participant commented,

“I think from my experience, the only sort of problem I have had is taking time off
for Eid or something because you don’t know the exact date because it is
dependent on the moon. It could be a Thursday or it could be a Friday, and you
need to give notice. If you only want to take the day of Eid off it can be confusing
getting that across to employers. With me it has been ok, but I know some
people haven’t managed to get the time off because they don’t know the exact
date so the employer is just like, well, you didn’t give me enough notice. It there
was a bit more understanding and flexibility like yeah ok we will have someone in
just in case it’s a Friday or a Saturday, we will have someone to cover for you – it
might make things a little bit easier”.

Across the survey and the Glasgow focus group it was noted that by disclosing
your name on a CV this could act as a barrier to progression along the
recruitment process. It was strongly felt perhaps a shift on not disclosing your
name would make for a fairer process. There was no fear of discrimination
based on your name from the Dundee focus group participants.

There was consensus amongst the focus group participants that projects such as
Amina’s Inspiring Aspirations were vital to address issues of confidence with an
understanding of faith and culture, thus working on stage 1 and 2 of the
employability pipeline, and thereafter for mainstream employment services to be more accessible by advertising wider in ME communities.

Many of the clients Amina works with are mums that have older children, lesser household responsibilities and are looking to contribute to the economy, develop their potential and skills, however struggle with confidence issues as well as lack of work experience. Work placements were seen as a positive measure to address this gap and support Muslim/ME women access employment.

“The jobcentre have provisions, but could they not have something more specific for BME women for work experience or the classes that they send you too. They could explain to employers that there is a short fall in the amount of BME women that are employed in a workplace, so they would like more opportunities available for us and get companies on board, and after the training/work experience it is up to the employer if they would like to keep them on.”

“More work placement and trial periods for experience for ‘older’ BME Women”

Overall, one of often cited barriers that affect Muslim/ME women is similar to women in general with regards to child care provision. There seems to be layered or additional barriers to recruitment for Muslim women. It’s clear from the evidence that Amina has collated, that there are very real experiences of potential discrimination, largely attributed to the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media, and heightened anti Muslim sentiment. Muslim or ME names and visible Muslim associated attire such as the hijab seem to allow for prejudice and lesser opportunity to have equal access to employment services, recruitment and progression.

Amina would welcome a scheme that recognises employers that take positive action or are working towards a more diverse workforce and inclusiveness. Good work practices should also be highlighted for other organisations to emulate.

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Amina – The Muslim Women’s Resource Centre
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