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Perceived Discrimination as Experienced by Muslims in New Zealand Universities

NEDA SALAHSHOUR  and ERIC BOAMAH 

Abstract

Since the March 15 attacks in Christchurch, there has been raised awareness and new and strong enthusiasm to understand the experiences of the Muslim minority community. This exploratory paper investigates the perceived discrimination as experienced by Muslims or those who identify with coming from a Muslim background and who work at New Zealand universities. Using a questionnaire, we surveyed the experiences of perceived discrimination of Muslim staff working at universities across the country and the impact it has had on the wellbeing of these members of the society. The study concludes that a significant minority perceive themselves as targets of discrimination within their workplace and even more people while not being directly impacted acknowledge that there is discrimination. This study hopes to raise awareness of the extent of discrimination perceived by Muslims with the hope of encouraging government and ministers to investigate the issue in more depth and providing guidelines for organizations.

Keywords: *discrimination; Muslims; New Zealand; universities; Christchurch attack*

Introduction

On the afternoon of Friday the 15th of March 2019, Muslims who were gathered at Friday prayers in a city located in New Zealand's southern island, Christchurch, were brutally terrorized by a gunman and his white supremacist ideology. The gunmen entered two mosques and used his automatic rifle to sabotage the lives of Muslims praying peacefully. The event led to the death of 51 people with many more severely injured. The tragic event which gained international headlines left a nation, often presented as *welcoming* towards diversity, in utter shock. It probed Kiwis to think about who we are as a nation and publicly discuss discourses surrounding hate crimes, racism, discrimination, gun laws and Islamophobia. While the empathetic and inclusive approach demonstrated by the current prime minister Ms Jacinda Adern after these attacks has been applauded and praised, following the attacks it became clear that warn-

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ings relating to the rising islamophobia had come from experts, scholars, and members of the Muslim community who claim that this sort of attack was “inevitable”¹ and that the community has been facing discrimination in various sectors for decades, but unfortunately their calls for action had fallen on deaf ears, particularly by former governments. These series of events and discourses suggest that there are insidious, subtle and often unheard attempts to exclude migrant communities in various contexts including the education workplace of New Zealand.

Exploring perceived experiences of discrimination is particularly important, as in most cases, it is so subtle that it is difficult to prove that it has occurred on account of one’s religion or ethnic background. As a result, it is possible that relatively few people risk raising formal complaints and jeopardizing their reputation by making claims which are difficult to prove. Therefore, in this study, the key focus here is on *perceived discrimination* and the aim is to investigate the experiences of Muslims or those who identify with coming from a Muslim background and who work in New Zealand universities.

The Demographics

Tracking the exact arrival of Muslims (or Mahometans as they were called at the time) to New Zealand is difficult. But some historical accounts suggest that Muslims are said to have arrived in New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth century with the first Muslim family from an Indian background to be recorded as residing in Canterbury according to government census dates as 1861.² Later in the 1900s more Indian Muslims started to arrive in larger numbers to reside in New Zealand. It is estimated that there were roughly 200 Muslims living throughout the country when the first Muslim association was established in Auckland in 1950. With the second world war coming to an end in the mid-twentieth century, immigration restrictions were relaxed allowing for immigrants and refugees to settle in New Zealand.³ In this sense the demographic make-up of the Muslim community residing in New Zealand consists of a very ethnically diverse and fragmented Muslim minority rather than a single ethnic group dominating the Muslims identity as is the case in some European countries.⁴

More recently, Islam is the fastest growing religion and as a result the population of Muslims in Western and multicultural societies such as New Zealand, are also growing. Relative to its size, New Zealand is one of the highest migrants-receiving countries in the world and is referred to as an immigration society by the OECD.⁵ Overall in terms of ethnic breakdown, according to the 2013 census, 74% of the population identified themselves as European, 15% as Maori, 12% as Asian, 7% Pacific and over 1% as Middle Eastern or Latin American.⁶ In 1991, the Muslim population of New Zealand sat at 6000. Currently it is sitting at 46,149, this comprises just over 1% of the population.⁷ Of these, 75% are overseas born.⁸ In terms of their ethnic and nationality breakdown, Fijian Muslims (20%) are the largest community followed by Iraqis (8%), Afghans (6%). The remaining are from a variety of countries including Somalia, Pakistan, India, Iran, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia.⁹

Diversity and Discrimination in New Zealand

This section commences with a brief outline of media and public perceptions towards minority groups and/or Muslims before focusing more specifically on literature relating to discrimination in the workplace. Racism and discrimination have a deep-seated history in New Zealand. The Māori, New Zealand’s indigenous people lived in New

Zealand before the Europeans (predominantly British) discovered and colonized the country. The controversial Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 between New Zealand's indigenous Māori and the British Crown, which pledged to protect and ensure Māori as participating partners, was subsequently ignored by the British Crown leading to a century of systematic racism against the Māori. The treaty and the bicultural agreement it entails has only recently resurfaced in public debate and official policy.¹⁰ As a result of the Treaty, New Zealand is recognized as a bicultural society despite its multicultural reality.

The fact that New Zealand is composed of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, a de facto multicultural state, maintaining bicultural identity and policy reflects an underlying socio-political challenge that affects different levels of the society.¹¹ Reports surveying the perspectives of New Zealanders towards migration report that 64% believe that Muslim holidays and celebrations should be recognized. Having said this, 44% of New Zealanders who took part in the same study would not want a mosque in their neighbourhood. This points to a principle/practice gap that scholars¹² have referred to i.e. an abstract versus concrete construal's of multiculturalism where people find concrete elements such as mosque more threatening than the concept of recognizing Muslim celebrations. People's perceptions of national identity and national character also influence the level of acceptance of diversity. The more people believe in the importance of ancestral heritage and certain cultural characteristics as being true to New Zealand identity, the more hostile they tend to be towards diversity.¹³

In addition to national identity and character, the media also plays a role in constructing perceptions. Studies into the media representation of Muslim migrants reveal that there is a tendency for international media to frame Islam negatively and almost exclusively link Islam with terrorism.¹⁴ The impact of the 9/11 and the media coverage of the event also had a profound effect on Islam and its community "claiming recognized cultural space" in New Zealand.¹⁵ Consequently, New Zealand media coverage of events relating to the Muslim community has not been sympathetic either. From the perspective of the media practitioners in New Zealand, news media coverage of Muslims and Islam contained generalizations about the Islamic faith and its adherents, which contributed to the dehumanization of minorities.¹⁶ While there are some editorials which present liberal and pluralist constructions of Islamic identity, most hard news reinforce Orientalist representation of Muslims¹⁷ and give significant emphasis to Islamic terrorism and maintain silence when inaccurate representations of Muslims were found. This in turn has led to existential fear in New Zealand society about Islam and Muslims.¹⁸

Given the above, one of the most common risks for Muslim immigrants living in New Zealand is the significantly negative perceptions of Muslims. While this risk has been dubbed "moderately low" implying that when it occurs, it is more likely to be as verbal insults rather than physical violence, the impact that this has on psychological well-being of these members of our society should not be downplayed.¹⁹

Research regarding the impact of discrimination has predominantly focused on racial and ethnic discrimination and its health impacts²⁰ and the associated longitudinal health effects of racial discrimination.²¹ There is proven evidence that racism and discrimination have a negative impact on the psychological functioning of migrants.²² More specifically, workplace bullying has a negative impact on self-esteem, anxiety, stress, fatigue, burnout, depression, and post-traumatic stress²³ and on businesses and organizations who have to deal with absenteeism and turnover.²⁴

A large number of these studies have focused on a specific minority group, the indigenous Māori, who despite being the original settlers in New Zealand, have faced over a

century of systematic discrimination.²⁵ Others have focused on the health challenges presented to Asians who have experienced discrimination.²⁶ In addition to general physical health, the impact of discrimination on mental health has been investigated at length.²⁷ Studies about Muslim women and their experiences of religious discrimination shows how wearing the *hijab* and having a strong psychological affiliation with Islam increased the likelihood of negative experiences resulting in greater experiences of perceived discrimination²⁸ and evidence shows that even in predominantly Islamic countries such as Turkey there is more egregious discrimination against members of belief groups other than the Sunni-Hanefite majority and those who wear headscarves.²⁹ Interestingly, practicing Islam acted as a buffer against these negative impacts for the victims.³⁰

Discrimination in the Workplace

Focusing more specifically on New Zealand employment and workplaces, studies are few and far between.³¹ In the context of New Zealand, broad studies investigating perceived discrimination as experienced in workplaces and the impact of managerial support as an antecedent to determine if this reduces perceptions of discrimination have been investigated. Workplace discrimination includes overt threats or hostile acts, it can also comprise subtle behaviours such as altering a person's tasks, removing or withholding resources needed for work performance, criticizing, social isolation, unwanted comments on a person's private life, verbal aggression and spreading rumours about the person.³² Studies indicate that workplace stress as a result of workplace bullying is significantly high in New Zealand's education sector.³³ A recent annual survey gauging diversity issues in New Zealand workplaces indicates that in 2019, bullying and harassment tend to occur more frequently in the public sector and "while 85% of all organizations have implemented either formal policies and/or programs and initiatives, bullying and harassment appear more prevalent than before".³⁴ One of the strongest forms of discrimination is "access discrimination" where religious minorities are discriminated against during the hiring stage.³⁵

Researchers have extensively examined the discriminatory decisions and practices of employers and have shown how CVs with whitened names are more likely to be short-listed.³⁶ One way through which employers identify the applicants' background is through names and names containing ethnic names given in CVs adversely impact the likelihood of migrants getting jobs. To overcome this challenge minorities' attempt to avoid discrimination by concealing or downplaying racial cues in job applications a practice often referred to as "resume whitening". A study conducted by researchers at Auckland University hypothesized that ethnic Asian applicants of equal quality will be less likely to be shortlisted for employment than European/Pakeha applicants and that the "ethnic cue" and "immigration status" of the applicants' name will increase the "ethnic penalty" in employment shortlisting. In other words, across ethnic groupings, additional penalties appear to apply to those who are immigrants, with foreign qualifications and experience, and/or "foreign sounding names".³⁷ To address some of these challenges, New Zealand provides a framework for the recognition of the rights of New Zealand's diverse faith communities. New Zealand legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate on religious grounds and gives people the right to express themselves religiously. New Zealand is a signatory to international human rights declarations and conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948, Article 18); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966, Article 18) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

(ICESCR, 1966, Article 13). The right to religion is also found in New Zealand legislation, including the Bill of Rights Act (BORA, 1990); the Human Rights Act (HRA, 1993); and, the Employment Relations Act (ERA, 2000). These give the right to express ourselves religiously, and to be protected from discrimination on the grounds of religion. The Bill of Rights Act (BORA, 1990) which affirms the right to: freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (Section 13); to express religion and belief in worship, observance, practice, or teaching (Section 15); and, of minorities to be free from discrimination (Section 20). Secondly, the Human Rights Act (HRA, 1993) prohibits discrimination based on religious and ethical beliefs in employment, in partnerships, in access to places, vehicles and facilities, in the provision of goods and services and in the provision of land, housing and accommodation. In the area of employment, the Act creates a clear obligation in relation to meeting the particular practices of an employee's religious or ethical beliefs. An employer is obliged to reasonably accommodate an employee's religious beliefs.

Despite the given literature, no study has investigated the Muslim population within the education sector or universities specifically. Nor has there been a preliminary study exploring whether there has been a change in the levels of perceived discrimination prior to and post March 15th when 51 innocent Muslim lives were taken as a result of a violent terrorist attack at a mosque in Christchurch New Zealand. Moreover, Muslim activists and leaders had been calling on authorities to curb the hate being directed at the Muslim community for years. With consideration given to the above, this study investigates the perceptions and experiences of staff who identify with being a Muslim or from a Muslim background. Discrimination encompasses behaviours or practices that result in avoidable and unfair inequalities in power, resources or opportunities across groups in society based on various characteristics.³⁸ This study focuses on perceived discrimination which is defined as the perception of an individual that selective and different treatment is happening because of the individual's ethnic group membership³⁹ or in this case, because of their religious identity. The study aims to answer the following questions:

- (a) What are the perceptions and experiences of Muslims towards racism/discrimination and exclusions within their work places?
- (b) Has perceived discrimination increased as a result of March 15 as some media reports claim?
- (c) How have experiences of racism/discrimination and exclusion impacted Muslims within their workplaces?

Data Collection

Key Muslim community leaders were consulted to discuss initial ideas on how to properly identify key participants, how to appropriately phrase questions so they are culturally appropriate and how to effectively communicate and engage with members within their communities to elicit relevant information from them. Following the initial interaction with the key Muslim leaders, ideas from the preliminary literature review were used to prepare the survey. In order to ensure that the survey questions and responses are fit for purpose, the researchers informally discussed their methodology and approach with a senior lecturer who teaches survey design at Victoria University of Wellington. Following these conversations, a pilot study was conducted with members from similar backgrounds as that of our prospective participants. As a result, the survey was shared with three other people from Muslim backgrounds who worked in the education sector.

The purpose was to elicit useful feedback on the survey's organization, wording, ethical considerations, validity and reliability tips. The feedback was informative and guided the revision of the survey.

Once the survey questions were drafted, they were entered into Survey Monkey and a link was generated which was then sent to two members of the Muslim community to provide feedback on. One of these members was an influential Muslim leader who has worked with New Zealand's Muslim community as part of her numerous not-for-profit roles. She was asked to provide feedback on the content of the survey to ensure that they were culturally appropriate. A second member was a Muslim academic in the Institute of Technology and Polytechnic who had extensive experience with designing surveys. In addition to ensuring the questions were culturally appropriate, this member also provided extensive feedback on the questions to ensure that all possible responses could be captured. The survey was then sent to numerous people to test before being sent out to the study participants.

Selection of Participants

There were numerous ways in which participants were identified. The first includes through referrals which led to a snowball effect i.e. the key contacts of the lead researcher led to further contacts which in turn led to many other contacts. These individuals were contacted on a one by one basis and information about the purpose of the project was shared with them alongside the link to the survey.

The second way in which participants were recruited for this study included forming a Facebook page and sharing the link to the project details and invitation for participants to take part through sharing the project page in numerous Muslim community groups pages. The researchers identified 12 community groups throughout New Zealand dedicated solely to the Muslim community. Some of these community groups were specific to certain locations e.g. Waikato Muslims or Muslims in Wellington. Others pertained to New Zealand as a whole e.g. Muslims of New Zealand.

The third way in which participants were recruited was through contacting the chaplaincy services of the 8 universities listed below, as well as through city mosques. Through direct contact with Muslim chaplains, we were able to have the link passed on to the staff members from Muslim backgrounds who worked at the universities and who visited the chaplaincy frequently.

Finally, the fourth and most effective form of participant recruitment applied in this study was to contact staff members directly using the contact details provided in their public staff page. There are eight universities in New Zealand, namely Auckland University of Technology, Victoria University of Wellington, University of Auckland, Waikato University, Massey University, Lincoln University, University of Canterbury and Otago University. The recruitment of participants commenced in December 2019 and ended in March 2020 and therefore took roughly four months of proactive engagement. The schools and faculty staff pages of all schools and faculties were carefully searched through to identify prospective Muslims or people from Muslim backgrounds. Staff names were used as key indicators, and if the members had an Arabic name or a name with Arabic roots, Persian or Turkish names these were relatively easy to identify.

Emails outlining information about the project and the participant rights including details about what they are consenting to were sent to these staff members. The researchers acknowledge that religious identity is a very private matter and one that cannot be

determined through outward manifestations and/or names. We therefore asked the recipients to assess their eligibility in the project themselves by answering the following two questions:

- (a) Do you identify with being a Muslim or from a Muslim background?
- (b) Do you work (in any role) in the New Zealand education sector?

Those who assessed themselves as not eligible were asked to discard/ignore the email. We also asked them to pass on the link to any of their colleagues and friends who might be interested and eligible to take part in this study. Some recipients receiving the invitation to participate showed interest in the research and either followed up with a telephone conversation to discuss the research or referred other people who could potentially be interested or by completing the survey. In one case however, we received the following response from an academic staff member who indicated he had completed the survey but who believed the study was not needed and said:

There is no discrimination and you are trying in the questions to make out something that does not exist. The Christchurch attack was an isolated incident. It does not reflect the way the society thinks. Did you not see the outpouring of sympathy and solidarity expressed by the country from all ethnicities, ages etc? So in my view the survey is un called for.

Responses such as the above indicate precisely the gap that this project aims to address. While there is no doubt that the solidarity immediately following the Christchurch incident was humbling, it also indicates that in the absence of actual data and research, people can only speculate about whether discrimination against the Muslim community does or does not exist in New Zealand workplaces.

The Questionnaire

The data collection yielded a 73% completion rate which meant that of every 100 participants who started the questionnaire, 73% of these completed the questionnaire. The expected time it took people to complete the survey was roughly 8 mins. The questionnaire consisted of 27 questions in total which were divided into four main sections which included, consent questions, identity questions, experiences of discrimination and finally information culture. We also set a questionnaire collector restriction so that each participant can only respond to the questionnaire once to prevent users completing the questionnaire multiple times and skewing the results. Participants were also informed that they can contact the researchers should they have any questions.

The first section of the questionnaire outlined the purpose of the study and surveyed the eligibility of the participants. The eligibility questions given in the first section of the questionnaire outlined what participants are consenting to by completing the questionnaire, inquired whether they are Muslim or from a Muslim background and whether they work for the education sector in New Zealand. If they responded “no” to either of these, the participant was directed to the disqualification page. If participants assessed themselves as being eligible, they were then asked to confirm that they had read the information sheet relating to the research project and consent to taking part in this questionnaire. The second section was an “about you” section which gathered data relating to the demographic data such as age, ethnic background, type of educational organization, ethnicity and level of religiosity as well as the city they work in. Some have

posited that “religious identity is co-constructed by individuals and their social context” and as such, “being Muslim means different things to different people, but individuals may draw upon different resources from their religious tradition to perform or represent themselves in different way.”⁴⁰ The level of religiosity was used to ensure that we don’t exclude members of the Muslim community who do not actively practice Islam but still identify with being Muslim. It also ensures that given sufficient responses, we could measure to see whether there is a correlation between the level of religiosity and their experiences of discrimination within their workplaces. Collecting data on the city they work in, allowed us to ensure the results from this study are representative of New Zealand more broadly.

The third section begins by defining what discrimination is and provided some examples to the participant and asked the participant to bear the definition in mind when completing the questionnaire. This was added to ensure that the participant had a clear understanding of what is and what is not considered as discrimination under the New Zealand legislation. The questions investigated the length of employment with their current employer, their experiences of discrimination within their workplace, and whether they felt supported within their workplaces after the Christchurch attack in March 2019.

Finally, the last section surveyed their information culture by seeking to understand how comfortable they felt reporting instances of discrimination and whether they were familiar with their organizational policies on diversity strategy, among other questions. This paper presents the results from sections 1–3 of the questionnaire and sheds light on the perceived experiences of discrimination as experienced by the Muslim community. A separate paper will discuss the responses relating to section four i.e. information culture of this community.

Analysis of Data

The following sub-section elaborate on dominant themes arising from the questionnaire.

Identity and Religiosity

When surveying the religious identity of the participants, we acknowledged that Muslim identity can fall across a spectrum. For this reason, a question was posed to participants to elicit whether they are practicing Muslims, practice some elements of Islam, or don’t practice Islam but still identify with being from a Muslim background. The results showed that Muslims working in various New Zealand universities felt comfortable to reveal both their cultural and religious identity when taking part in the questionnaire. Out of all 38 responses, only one person decided not to reveal their ethnic background. Members of the Muslim community in New Zealand come from a very diverse ethnic background of different contexts outside New Zealand. [Table 1](#) below presents a summary of the biographical information on the respondents from the universities.

The majority of participants who took part in this study, came from countries in the Middle East to settle and work in New Zealand. But, some of them originally come from Europe, Africa, Southeast Asians, and Pacific Island countries. The majority representing 71.05% of the participants in this study who responded from the universities indicated that they practice Islam. That is, they observe Islam’s principles such as diligently praying five times a day, observing fasting, and paying *zakat* etc at all times and places, including their workplaces. 13.16% indicated that they practice some of the elements

Table 1. Summary of biographical data on all respondents from the universities.

Geographical distribution		Personal identity		Ethnic identity		Age distribution	
City	No. of resp.	Male	Female	Ethnicity	No of resp.	Age group	No. of resp.
Auckland	19	20	18	Arab	9	18–24	2
Wellington	5			Pakistan	5	25–34	10
Christchurch	4			Persian	4	35–44	18
Hamilton	4			Turk/Azeri	4	45–54	6
Dunedin	3			Southeast Asian	3	55–64	1
Tauranga	3			Indo-Fijian	3	65+	1
Palmerston North	2			Bangladesh	2		
				Indian	2		
				Maldives	1		
				European	1		
				Sri Lankan	1		
				African	1		
				Afghanistan	1		
				Prefer not to say	1		
Total	38		38		38		38

of Islam but not all. Another 13.16% said they do not practice any of the elements of Islam at all. But they still consider themselves as Muslims. One respondent, however, preferred not to say whether they are practicing or non-practicing Muslims.

It was not surprising to see the majority of the respondents in this study coming from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, and Hamilton areas. Most of the main universities in New Zealand are found in these cities. However, the lower number in Wellington compared with Auckland could be partially attributed to the proportionally lower number of people who live in Wellington compared to that of Auckland. What is unclear, however, is the low numbers in both Dunedin and Palmerston North. These two cities host some of the biggest and oldest universities in the country. The fairly balanced gender distribution in the responses to the questionnaire suggests that both male and female Muslims are equally active in the workplace. This contradicts the traditional belief that Muslim women usually stay at home to look after the kids while the men go to work.

Experience of Discrimination

International evidence suggests that as many as 40% of all migrants may experience some form of discrimination in the workplace.⁴¹ Closer to New Zealand, an Australian report concludes that “race-based” discrimination (linked to race, ethnicity, culture or religion) remains unacceptably high and may in fact be increasing. In the state of Victoria, Australia, 38% of respondents born in non-English speaking countries reported discrimination in the workplace because of their ethnic origin.⁴²

In this research, the majority of Muslims working in various universities in New Zealand reported to be largely happy and comfortable at their workplaces. 76.32% said nobody has ever made them feel uncomfortable, unsafe or hurt at their workplace for being a Muslim or because of their Muslim background. While there may be other forms of discrimination, they do not perceive any form of discrimination as a result of

their religious background. Nevertheless, a *significant* minority i.e. 23.7% perceive that at least somebody at their workplaces has made them feel uncomfortable, unsafe or hurt for being Muslim or coming from a Muslim background. Other studies which do not focus on the Muslim community *per se* have reported that workplace discrimination is rather uncommon with just over ten per cent of workers in the New Zealand General Social Survey (2008) stating that they “in the last 12 months had been/have felt discriminated against due to race, skin colour, or ethnicity either in public or in their workplace.”⁴³ Comparing this with the results from this study, where 23.7% of Muslim who participated were made to feel uncomfortable, this is highly significant number and quite worrying.

A very interesting finding is that when asked whether participants had experienced discrimination as a result of their religious identity themselves, 65.79% said they had never experienced discriminations themselves. However, when asked whether there is discrimination within their workplaces, only 50% said they believed there is no discrimination in their workplace. In other words, the 15.79% discrepancy between the two figures indicates that fewer participants have been the direct target of discrimination themselves but they are aware of wider discrimination in their organization and/or may have observed/witnessed their colleagues being discriminated against.

Forms of Discrimination

An online survey to assess the presence of prejudice among New Zealanders launched in 2016, invited people from all backgrounds to report instances of prejudice that they have experienced themselves.⁴⁴ There is little research in the context of New Zealand documenting the common forms and the shapes that discrimination takes for Muslims working in the education sector. According to respondents who took part in our questionnaire, most of the discriminatory acts are usually done by their peers in their teams, managers at various levels, especially immediate bosses, or subordinates. For those who have been discriminated against, 26.32% had been discriminated by their managers. Interestingly, the responses suggest that not only are subordinates discriminated by their managers, sometimes managers who come from Muslim backgrounds themselves become targeted by the people they manage. In this study, 5.26% were Muslim managers or in some form of a leadership role in the university workplace, who indicated that they have received discrimination from their subordinates while 7.89% received discrimination from their peers.

The questionnaire also elicited detailed ways in which participants had felt they were treated differently/discriminated against as a result of being Muslim or from a Muslim background. Participants were given the option to tick as many options that applied to them. The responses reveal an interesting distribution of how Muslims working in New Zealand universities suffer discrimination in various ways, including the following two most selected forms:

Make Assumptions About Their Ability. The majority of the study participants believe that most of the discrimination they receive from their workplace is borne out of an over-generalised belief widely held by those who discriminate against Muslims and people with a Muslim background. Of these 36.84% indicated that colleagues have made negative assumptions about their ability, character or behaviour based on stereotypes of being Muslim or from a Muslim background. Some examples could be that their ability to com-

plete a task successfully has been questioned. Thus, assuming that someone who is from a Muslim background is incapable in carrying out a specific task as they are not local or have not been educated in New Zealand and therefore would not be able to carry out the task to a satisfactory level. If a staff member is not assigned a task as a result of such assumptions, this is discriminatory. Other examples of this type of discrimination is when people express surprise at Muslims or people coming from a Muslim background taking part in activities that involve social events involving alcoholic drinks, etc. The assumption such people are having here is that Muslims or people with Muslim backgrounds wouldn't join a work event where alcohol is involved and as a result of this assumption, the Muslim colleague might not get invited. Such stereotypes are influencing most of the other types of discrimination against Muslims and, as shown in the study responses, encourage people to treat Muslims differently at the various university workplaces creating a sense of exclusion.

Exclude or Treat Them Differently. Academia, like most workplaces, hinges on teamwork, collaboration among team members and between teams for people to feel belong and confidently perform their role. Most of this teamwork happens in the form of meetings, workshops, seminars and social events that take place both within and outside the workplace. It can be very unsafe and uncomfortable if people are intentionally excluded from such meetings and teamwork for any reason. But when the motive is based on one's religion or background, the experience can be disheartening. In this study, four university respondents representing 10.53% indicated that they felt that their peers or managers or other people at their workplace have intentionally excluded them from a meeting or social event because of their Islamic religion or background as a Muslim while a further 15.79% indicated that they had been treated differently (in a negative way).

Impact of Discrimination on Muslims Working in New Zealand Universities

The majority of the respondents i.e. 65.79% indicated that they had never experienced discrimination at their workplace so were not negatively impacted by it either. But the remaining respondents who have experienced various forms of discrimination as a result of being a Muslim or coming from a Muslim background, reveal the various ways the discrimination they suffered have impacted their work and lives. The two most selected impacts were as follows: 15.79% of respondents said they became stressed at work while 18.42% became unhappy as a result of the abuse they received because of their identity and background as Muslims. Some of them explained the impact on them in the following comments:

I reacted positively, taking this as an opportunity to live the *summah* and give *da'wah* to those who don't understand my faith. I have taken up *da'wah* training so that I can better respond to people who make remarks about their assumptions about me and Muslims in general.

I have experienced discrimination once in my current workplace, and that was a few years ago. The person who did this did apologise afterward and has left.

I experienced depression and isolation, and regretting that the current issues in [my country] have made the world forget it is a place of a great civilisation and now people in NZ look down at us, given the fact that Christchurch is home of the NZ skinhead racists (even against the Maori people)

In other words, the impact of discrimination against Muslims at the university workplace does not only affect work but their whole personality and society. The first comment above indicates that some participants rely on their faith to help them get through their experiences of discrimination. In other words, religion has a protective role and acts as a buffer for Muslims when faced with discrimination. While it is great that these participants have such a spiritual and inner tool to help them, they shouldn't have to do this. Organizations should have policies and training to help support staff.

Discussion

This exploratory study hoped to shed light on the experiences of Muslims working at universities. The commonly held notion is that universities are places where the *consciences of society* work and members who are the most educated members of our societies work and therefore there would be little experiences of discrimination. Exploring perceived experiences of discrimination is particularly important as in most cases, it is so subtle that it is difficult to prove and therefore difficult to raise formal complaints against. Yet, it has the power to make members of the community feel excluded and ostracized.

This study indicates that while the majority of the participant had not experienced discrimination in their workplaces themselves, there is a significant minority who perceive themselves as targets of discrimination. This study shows that roughly one in four Muslims have been made to feel uncomfortable, unsafe and hurt for their religious identities and that a further 25% while not perceiving themselves as targets, have seen or witnessed or perceive discrimination to exist within their workplaces. Other findings indicate that the one in four people didn't feel as supported as they would have expected by their organizations following the Christchurch attack. The narrative indicated that Muslims felt ignored by their managers and/or peers. This certainly corroborates with conversations we the researchers had with Muslims immediately following the attack where peers indicated that people in their organization had come back after the weekend as if nothing had happened, totally ignoring the topic.

One of the most interesting findings from this study relates to the forms of discrimination where the majority of participants indicated that they frequently felt that assumptions were being made about their abilities to carry out the job and tasks assigned to them as a result of their religious identity. This form of gate keeping of the tasks at work are significantly worrying as they could result in situations where Muslims are not given the same opportunities to grow in their professional roles creating a vicious circle where minorities are held back from professional development opportunities and then not offered senior roles as a result of not having the required experience or skills. Other common forms of discrimination included excluding Muslims from conversations, meetings and using information gate keeping as a means to discriminate. Both these forms of discrimination allude to lack of trust in Muslims. Furthermore, the literature on the impact that discrimination has on employee well-being is significant but according to participants in this study, the major impact that discrimination has on employees' well-being is that they become stressed and unhappy and wanted to explore alternative jobs.

Conclusion

This study illuminates that further understanding of the lived experiences of Muslims who work in New Zealand's education sector is needed. New Zealand's education

sector is strife with psychological stress as a result of bullying and discrimination⁴⁵ and has often been referred to the sector where the most cases of workplace bullying occur. This is of grave concern as Muslims are significant vulnerable minority who work within this sector and are often unaware of their rights to talk about their experiences of discrimination.

It is recommended that extensive workplace training opportunities elevating intercultural understanding are provided for all diverse members to understand what constitutes as workplace discrimination and what their rights and avenues for complaint are. Extensive intercultural training which encourages members of each workplace community to better understand one another's culture is needed to improve social cohesion among diverse members of our communities. This has often been avoided, with New Zealand workplaces being dubbed as secular. While this may be true, it is important to acknowledge that religious identities do not get left at the front door the minute a person leaves to work.

Limitations of the Study

As a preliminary exploratory study, and given the modest number of responses, the results the results of this study cannot be generalized widely. However, this study hopes to put the topic of Muslim discrimination in the workplace on the radar and get researchers, the New Zealand government and its citizens talking more widely about this issue. This study makes contribution to the literature and has adopted a rigorous inclusive and community-led approach to participant recruitment. These included extensive stakeholder consultation with key Muslim leaders, Muslim academics, and Muslim researchers, distributing the questionnaire *via* social media as well as directly contacting roughly 200 Muslim academics to take part.

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