



COMBATTING ISLAMOPHOBIA

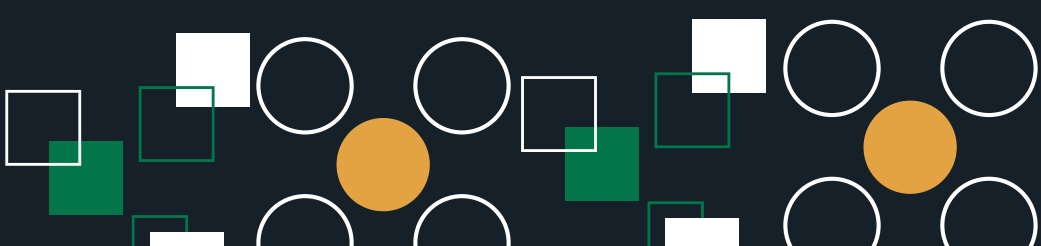
INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia continues to be a pressing issue in the City of Stratford, Town of St. Marys, and Perth County.

The intention of this guide is to provide an overview of how Islamophobia may be occurring in your community, your individual responsibility, and suggestions for how to combat Islamophobia and discrimination.



This guide includes strategies for responding to Islamophobia, the impact of Islamophobia (real or perceived) common misconceptions and stereotypes, hidden Islamophobia, and a case study from London, Ontario.






VISION

Especially in the work place, instances of Islamophobia are often committed unintentionally stemming from lack of understanding, making presumptions about another person's beliefs and practices, and general misconceptions. An intention may be good but the impact is negative.

We all have a responsibility within our spheres of influence to examine ourselves, our beliefs, and our actions while considering how assumptions and stereotypes may create an unsafe and unwelcoming environment.

The goal is to create, maintain, and foster environments wherever we are that are informed, safe, and comfortable for everyone regardless of background.



UNDERSTANDING ISLAMOPHOBIA

WHAT IS IT?

Islamophobia is the irrational fear, hatred and discrimination against Muslims, or those perceived to be Muslims. It can manifest in various forms including, but not limited to, verbal abuse, physical violence, discrimination, and social exclusion.

To address this issue, we must recognize common misconceptions and stereotypes that perpetuate Islamophobia.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS & STEREOTYPES

- i. Islam promotes violence and terrorism
- ii. Muslim women are oppressed and have no agency
- iii. All Muslims are Arabs
- iv. Muslims are not good citizens and seek to impose Sharia Law
- v. All Muslims look and dress the same







INTENT VS IMPACT

Most people, particularly in a workplace environment, have good intentions and do not intentionally do or say something that would negatively impact another person. However, lack of understanding, "raised in a different time", or "unable to keep up" are thoughts that heighten the need to learn and grow individually.

Recognizing that we all have differing backgrounds and may occasionally harbour prejudicial thoughts, it's important to understand that this doesn't make you a "bad person" or inherently wrong. It **does** trigger a responsibility to self-reflect, acknowledge our unconscious bias, and work to learn and grow from these experiences - especially when it is potentially harmful to another person we may know or encounter. We need to recognize unconscious bias, but also analyze how these biases are formed.

COMMON IMPACTS REGARDLESS OF INTENTION

-  Psychological and emotional harm
-  Barriers to multiple aspects of life
-  Polarization & division within communities
-  Underreporting of hate crimes and incidents

HIDDEN ISLAMOPHOBIA

Hidden Islamophobia refers to subtle, implicit biases and prejudices that may not be overt but still contribute to discrimination and exclusion.

It can be challenging to identify, but is just as harmful as overt Islamophobia.

This is the most common type to occur in workplaces.

What Does it Look Like?

Microaggressions

Assumptions

Stereotypes

Unconscious Bias

Why Does it Happen?

There's no one-size answer but some general motivations are upbringing, lack of exposure, and lack of understanding.

What Can I Do?

The key to addressing hidden Islamophobia is to hold yourself accountable and be willing to keep an open mind and learn. Just like learning a new job, everyone has the capacity to learn new ways of understanding.




CASE STUDY:

THE AFZAAL FAMILY

The 2021 London, Ontario attack on the Afzaal family is a stark reminder of the presence and consequences of Islamophobia in our area.

Nathaniel Veltman was found guilty after he intentionally used his vehicle to murder four members of the family as they were out for a walk. The victims were unknown to Veltman at the time of the attack.

Reflection Questions

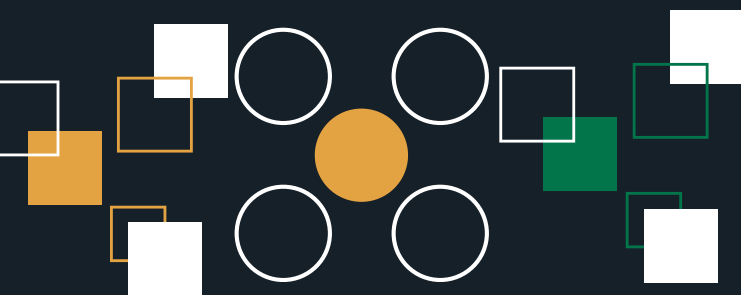
- Am I aware of real world and local incidents of Islamophobia including violent and non-violent discrimination?
 - Do I understand how thoughts based in false understanding and prejudice can lead to violent actions against another person and therefore, how the existence of prejudice can make one feel unsafe?
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TOOL BOX FOR SUCCESS

So what do we do?

The next few pages will highlight some of the more common ways Islamophobia is demonstrated, with suggestions of how to react, address, and correct to help improve relationships with others and create a safe and inclusive environment.

When unsure, focus and embrace that individuality of each person we encounter. Everyone has unique backgrounds, needs, likes, wants, ambitions, and experiences that contribute to who they are and what they need. Actively work to dismantle systemic barriers and biases to ensure everyone, regardless of their unique experiences and differences from yourself, have access to an equitable future.



ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRANSGRESSION



MICROAGGRESSIONS

Pay attention and make an intentional effort to stop microaggressions. These are subtle, usually unintentional, acts or comments that are steeped in prejudice.

ie. Offhand remarks, stereotyping, backhanded compliments

UNEQUAL TREATMENT

Be vigilant for disparities in how Muslim or Muslim-perceived employees/residents are treated in comparison to their colleagues/neighbours.

ie. differential access to opportunities, exclusion from events



BIAS BREAKER

The perception that equity-denied groups are given more opportunities solely because of diversity initiatives as opposed to their skills, qualifications, and abilities is a misconception stemming from xenophobia that falsely claim that immigrants are stealing jobs.

Diverse perspectives and talents actually lead to more innovation and inclusive growth that benefits everyone.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRANSGRESSION



LANGUAGE/JOKES

Refrain from making or laughing at inappropriate or derogatory jokes. Coded language or humour can be used to reinforce stereotypes. This type of language stems from unconscious biases.

Stereotyping: Unconsciously assigning tasks or projects based on stereotypes which assume someone may or may not be interested in specific roles ie. assigning diversity components to Muslim employees.

Lower Expectations: Hidden bias can lead to lower expectations of Muslim employees resulting in ostracization from peers and limited career advancement opportunities. ie. performance review is not triggered for a Muslim employee when the same threshold would trigger a review for another employee.

Assumptions: Assumptions can lead to perceptions about one's abilities and hinder their relationships with others and ability to improve at their work. ie. removing "answering the phones" from a job description because a Muslim-presenting person entered the role.

Exoticism: Viewing Muslims as exotic or different can undermine their professionalization, and contribute to feelings of isolation and discomfort. ie. asking someone to display an aspect of culture for entertainment purpose.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRANSGRESSION



ISOLATION

Notice if a Muslim person is excluded or isolated from workplace activities and conversations.

ie. always having to cover public access sites during celebrations

CULTURAL INSENSITIVITY

Watch for signs of insensitivity such as towards religious practices, dietary restrictions, or holidays.

ie. refusing to have halal options at a catered lunch



BIAS BREAKER

Choosing to include traditions from other cultures does not indicate that traditions you are familiar with can't occur. The point is to **add** not take away.

What does that look like?

An office may decorate for December with a Christmas tree and choose to decorate it with symbols from other cultures represented in the office. Hanukkah candles are on the desk, and Eid decorations adorn the halls.

WORK WITH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES



Going back to basics, those who are living the experience know best so refer to the experts. Ask questions and remember that individualism exists as well. Muslim people differ from each other in terms of extent of practice, personal beliefs, likes, and dislikes just like any other person. When in doubt, just ask in a respectful way.

Remember to be patient with your efforts. Individuals and groups who have been subjected to negative experiences may not want to engage with or trust others without a foundation being built first.

- ✦ Foster open and collaborative relationships with local Muslim communities, Mosques, and Cultural Centres.
- ✦ Engage in regular dialogue with community members to understand concerns and what's working well.
- ✦ Collaborate with community leaders to identify potential threats and develop strategies to protect places vulnerable to attacks.
- ✦ Allow Muslims to speak for themselves and articulate their history, perspectives, and beliefs while validating their experience.

SECURITY & PHYSICAL SAFETY



Muslims continue to be targeted in physical violence attacks, threats, and violence against their homes and buildings. Being aware of the vulnerability and assisting with prevention measures can help to reduce violence.

Remember, violent acts stem from harmful thought processes and unfounded beliefs that have been outlined in this guide. Holding ourselves and each other accountable is key to curbing violent acts.

- ✦ Conduct comprehensive security assessments in collaboration with security experts for your area
- ✦ Identify vulnerabilities and potential risks in the community or your organization and make a safety plan
- ✦ Assess the adequacy of existing security measures, both physical and digital
- ✦ Collaborate with other agencies to provide support to victims addressing immediate and long-term goals

FURTHER LEARNING

RESOURCES

Resources can be accessed online and through local libraries

Erasing Barriers, Enhancing Safety: A Review of Systems and Strategies for Supporting Muslim Women and Girls Facing Gender-based Violence- Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)

International Day to Combat Islamophobia- United Nations

Islamophobia: A critical issue in Canadian society- Turner Consulting Group

Islamophobia at Work- Canadian Labour Congress

Islamophobia at Work: Challenges and Opportunities- British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do I recognize and respond to hidden Islamophobia exhibited by myself? Exhibited by others?
- How does the presence of Islamophobia impact productivity and cohesion in a workplace environment? In social settings?
- What can I do to contribute to reducing discrimination in all areas of my life?

CONTACT

Combatting Islamophobia is a collective effort and everyone is entering the movement from different backgrounds and starting points.

If you have any questions about this guide or would like to know more, please reach out.



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