



# ISLAMOPHOBIA IN WATERLOO REGION

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Report on the Community Consultation about  
Islamophobia for the Coalition of Muslim Women and  
the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council.

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 **Waterloo Region  
Crime Prevention Council**  
*Together for a Safer Community*



## Message

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The Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (WRCPC) and the Coalition of Muslim Women of KW (CMW) are very pleased to present the first of its kind report: *Islamophobia in Waterloo Region*. The targeted killings of Muslim worshippers inside the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City was a disturbing wake up call for Canadian institutions working on race and social justice issues, to pay urgent attention to the rise in Islamophobia.

CMW has been engaged in pioneering work to eliminate hate crime and biases against Muslim women since 2012. WRCPC has championed and actively supported community dialogues about challenging topics such as the often unspoken violence against the LGBTQ+ community in the Waterloo Region as one form of discrimination and hate crime.

It was, therefore, natural for our two organizations to come together to also understand and document the community's experiences of Islamophobia at both interpersonal and systemic levels in the Waterloo region. In consultation with participants at the forum and the CMW broadly, we generated recommendations for local policy makers to address the issue of Islamophobia. Special thanks to Dr. Sarah Shafiq for coordinating our efforts and writing this unique report.

We hope that the report will act as a catalyst for action-based community responses to Islamophobia, underlying racism and xenophobia and further advance upstream approaches that create harmonious and peaceful communities.

**Fauzia Mazhar**, *Chair, CMW*  
**Shayne Turner**, *Chair, WRCPC*

# Introduction

Waterloo region is a promising community where many of us value each others' well-being. Many people from diverse communities have found refuge and stability in this region. However, this positive experience is often compromised by racism especially those at the margins of our society. The campaign to oppose the construction of an Islamic Centre and harassment and crimes targeting visible Muslims are a reminder that racism, hate and Islamophobia are still experienced in this region, like in many other communities.

The experience and traumatic impact of Islamophobia can come as a shock and sad surprise for many who consider Canada to be one of the best places to live in the world. Often we hear comments like: "At least Canada isn't as racist as the United States." That sentiment, however true, can act as a barrier to our community having authentic conversations about racism, Islamophobia and hate crimes within a Canadian context.

To disrupt such notions, we need to normalize very difficult but necessary community conversations on Islamophobia. Through open and respectful dialogue, we can achieve shared understandings that can lead to collective actions. Addressing Islamophobia and all forms of hate crimes requires an "all hands on deck" approach.

On November 7, 2018 the Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (WRCPC) and the Coalition of Muslim Women (CMW) partnered to facilitate a community conversation that brought attention to and increased understanding of Islamophobia both as a systemic as well as an interpersonal experience. The forum highlighted the impacts of racism on individuals and the community. The consultation was also an opportunity for the community to consider how in Waterloo region we can do a better job of addressing Islamophobia, thereby getting us closer to the community's values of inclusion and equity. We hope that this consultation (and subsequent report) will act as a catalyst for other community based conversations and for taking actions to prevent Islamophobia specifically and racism generally.

## We hope that for anyone who reads this report:

- ✔ **you learn something that you didn't know about Islamophobia**
- ✔ **it encourages you to be critical of media depictions of Islam and the Muslim community**
- ✔ **it gives you the courage to connect with people or organizations that are actively working to address and eradicate Islamophobia**
- ✔ **it gives you the courage to speak out the next time you are at a social/work gathering and someone makes an Islamophobic slur**

We trust this report inspires you to take some form of positive action, at a systems or individual level.

If you have been negatively impacted by Islamophobia, we want this report to give you some hope and let you know that, as a community, we see you, and you are not alone.

We are committed to, and actively engaged in creating a Waterloo region that is safe and welcoming for everyone.

## Who are the community partners for this consultation?



**The Coalition of Muslim Women of KW (CMW)** was founded in 2010 with the mandate to empower Muslim women and girls to be leaders and change makers. CMW provides opportunities for personal and professional growth, and leadership and skills development for Muslim women while addressing issues of racism, discrimination and Islamophobia through advocacy, activism, and bridge building. CMW facilitates Muslim women's active participation and engagement in civic and democratic life, tirelessly working towards building a society where Muslim women are valued, engaged, empowered and recognized as leaders. With over 40 members and 150 volunteers, CMW is the only organization in Waterloo region and surrounding areas solely managed by Muslim women. CMW's membership and volunteer opportunities are open to all women irrespective of their religious affiliations.



**The Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (WRPC)** encourages and supports community efforts that reduce and prevent crime, victimization and fear of crime. The WRPC is an initiative core funded by the Region of Waterloo since 1995. WRPC believes that when the well-being of all people matters then social justice and positive change follow.

## Executive Summary

**On Nov 7, 2018, a community consultation on Islamophobia was held at The Family Centre in Kitchener, Ontario. It was a partnership between the WRCPC and the Kitchener Waterloo CMW with the following goals:**

- ✔ **to develop an understanding of the extent and impact of Islamophobia in our community**
- ✔ **to generate solutions**

The event was well attended and well received with over 120 members of Waterloo region's community participating. It was a diverse audience with almost half representing the Muslim community and the other half from the larger non-Muslim community.

There were three main components of the program: (1) education (2) awareness raising and (3) community dialogue and consultation. Dr. Jasmin Zine laid the foundation through a presentation to aid understanding of the systemic aspects of Islamophobia. A panel of persons with lived experiences opened the eyes of many to the existence of anti-Muslim hate and its impact in our community. Three Muslim women of diverse backgrounds shared their personal experiences of Islamophobia, ranging from physical assaults to systemic manifestations of Islamophobia. The last hour and a half was devoted to the community dialogue and consultations in a round table format.

The primary findings were the sense that within the community Islamophobia was prevalent especially in schools, work places and public spaces. The root causes for this were identified as lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims and problematic media depictions of Muslims. The proposed solutions by the participants were to educate the public about Islam and Muslims, hold workshops for the local media outlets on the community concerns, and to form an advisory group on Islamophobia.



## Background

**According to the latest statistics, Canada has a large and growing Muslim population, comprising 3.2% of the population nationally, and 4.6% in Ontario (Canadian Census, 2011). According to the 2011 National Household Survey, Waterloo region was home to 18,900 Muslims or 3.8% of our region's population. The recent arrival of refugees from Muslim majority regions, and large-scale immigration has contributed to increasing the number of Muslims in Waterloo region.**

Islamophobia is not a new problem in our community. The CMW's pilot Hate Crimes and Incidents (HCI) project in 2012 was a pro-active response to the many experiences of hate and ignorance shared by the CMW membership. Various workshops and training sessions were conducted to bring awareness to the Muslim community on how to identify hate crimes as well as how to respond and heal. A major goal at the time was to encourage documentation of hate incidents. To that effect, the pilot project, with very limited resources, was able to collect data on close to 50 incidents of hate motivated actions in our region within one year. Anti-Muslim bias and Islamophobia are present on a continuum from isolated incidents, over harassment to hate motivated crimes. The primary finding was that many Muslim women were uncomfortable to report and document hate crimes/incidents even to a Muslim women-led organization, let alone report it to the police. The foremost recommendation from the published report was to scale up the HCI project more formally and with reliable funding.

While the latest Statistics Canada report cited a 207% increase in reported hate crimes for Muslims in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2018) in reality the increase is likely to be much higher. Waterloo region's hate crimes data from 2017 show a similar trend. Racialized and religious minority populations experienced an upward spike in hate crimes, with a 153% rise in reported incidents. Research shows that only one third of all

hate motivated crimes are reported (Leber, 2017). Nonetheless it is important to note that increases in reporting rates are not necessarily the same as actual increases. They may be a measure of a community involving police and may in reality signal an increased understanding of Islamophobia motivated crimes. At the same time, considering that two-third of all victims of hate crimes do not make a report, this percentage may be even higher for new immigrants coming from countries where trust in police is very low.

Given the regular mention of Muslims in news, related to violence, documented substantial increases in hate crimes against Muslims and an increase in political rhetoric fostering fear and suspicion (e.g., the niqab debate), much research is needed on anti-Muslim attitudes and behaviour. Despite this there have been few studies to date about Canadian Muslims. The Environics Institute conducted the first national survey to understand the experiences of Canadian Muslims in 2006. They followed it up with a survey one decade later in 2016. Dr. Jasmine Zine's work on Canadian Muslim youth and Selby and colleagues book **Beyond Accommodation: Everyday Narratives of Muslim Canadians** are a handful of examples of research work. These studies have been conducted at the national level, but no formal research or consultations have been conducted to understand the experiences of Muslims here in Waterloo region. WRCP and CMW aimed to start changing this by hosting the community consultation.

**The consultation objectives were:**

- ✔ to consult with the Waterloo region community on Islamophobia
- ✔ to share stories/lived experience of Islamophobia – institutional and personal
- ✔ to provide an opportunity to learn about Islamophobia
- ✔ to identify key issues to be addressed to identify next steps

Dr. Jasmine Zine laid the foundation for the consultation with a presentation about the status of Islamophobia in Canada by sharing very concerning statistics regarding the mistrust of Muslims in the larger Canadian population. Ironically these came to full light through misinformation in a campaign against Motion 103, a private member's bill that sought to include Islamophobia as a concern for the government of Canada. Dr. Zine also talked about random targeting of members of the Muslim Student Associations, including those at Wilfrid Laurier University, by Canadian Security Intelligence

Service (CSIS) in the name of “preventing terrorism”; the Quebec Charter of Values; the Barbaric Cultural Practices Act; Security Certificates, Combatting Violent Extremism (CVE), Bill C51 (Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act), etc. She finally spoke of the impact of national and provincial policies as well as discrimination in human services, housing, health care, education and workplaces as being especially detrimental for youth who report losing trust in authorities.

Two of the speakers who took part in our “lived experience panel” were grade 12 students and the third speaker was Anwaar Mousa from Cambridge. The first student shared the challenges she faced from her school administration in trying to form a student group for Muslims to support each other. The second student and Anwaar both gave powerful testimonies regarding experiences of Islamophobic hate crimes and the impact these continue to have on their sense of belonging.

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**Eye opening forum:  
[Islamophobia] is obviously  
more prevalent than I thought  
- which is very disturbing.**

## Consultation Findings

**The dialogue and consultation provided some very valuable insights. The participants were seated in a round table configuration and were given five questions to discuss. The questions and a summary of responses are provided below:**

**How prevalent is Islamophobia in our region? Where does it exist in our community? In which spaces, sectors, groups or institutions does it exist?**

The predominant response from the tables was that Islamophobia is very prevalent and present everywhere. Specific mentions were made of educational institutions, work places, online forums and public spaces.

**Have you, or someone you know, experienced Islamophobia? Feel free to share the experience and the impact.**

Participants shared multiple stories of their experiences that either occurred to themselves or to their family or friends. Their experiences ranged from verbal harassment and vandalism to physical assaults. There were a few incidents with dogs being used to threaten or intimidate Muslims, particularly women.

## How prevalent is Islamophobia in our Region?

“ It is increasingly becoming more prevalent, especially after some political figures are becoming openly Islamophobic. Prior to that it might have been prevalent but was less “out there”.

“ It is prevalent, but people don't report. It gets ignored and people feel ashamed to report and pretend it doesn't exist.

“ Islamophobia is everywhere, some places are worse than others. Not only Muslims but coloured people and people assumed to be Muslims [are affected].

“ No place is exempt. It is easy to post it on social media as one feels more comfortable to show hate [there].

**What are the root-causes of anti-Muslim hate, in your opinion?**

Ignorance/lack of education about Islam/Muslims (cited 10 times), hatred of Islam (3 times); media's bias and selective coverage (21 times); fear of Muslims/"the other" and/or of loosing jobs and/or loosing culture because of immigration (19 times).

There were also mentions of the following root causes:

- ✔ Dehumanization of Muslims;
- ✔ Historical aspects of colonization;
- ✔ The 'us versus them' mentality; and
- ✔ Supremacist groups/ultra right movements that blame others.

Participants at one table spoke of victim blaming and internalised Islamophobia whereby Muslims label more conservative members of the Muslim community as “extremists”.

### What are some solutions?

The overwhelming solution offered by the participants was education to promote awareness in the broader community about Islam and Muslims.

#### Other solutions included the following:

- ✔ Holding similar events
- ✔ Policies that counter Islamophobia
- ✔ Solidarity actions and a clear sense of the responsibilities of allies
- ✔ Clear consequences for hate speech

- ✔ The Charter for Inclusive Communities
- ✔ Support groups for the victims of hate
- ✔ Brave spaces
- ✔ Bridge building projects like art, cooking, music, gardening programs, etc

### Who needs to be involved in finding those solutions?

The overall agreement was that **everyone** should be involved. Islamophobia will only be solved if more people became aware of what Islam is and who Muslims are.

#### Especially mentioned were:

- ✔ Community leaders (7 times)
- ✔ Schools (4 times)
- ✔ Government (4 times)
- ✔ Allies (3 times)

### What should be our priority as we develop a region-wide approach?

There were suggestions that our region’s educational institutions have to do more through teacher trainings, supporting students who experience anti-Muslim hate and equipping parents with how to handle such situations.

All of the groups/individuals shared stories of Islamophobia from within Waterloo region and based on these varied examples it can be seen that such instances occur across diverse demographics and within diverse spaces including: neighbourhoods, libraries, book clubs, class setting, within families, social media, etc.

### What was not discussed?

Most striking were also the issues that were **not** discussed. Even though the keynote speaker detailed the systemic aspects of Islamophobia, the participants did not mention the link, for example, between the Global War on Terror and Islamophobia. The primary consideration at the event was the interpersonal nature of anti-Muslim hate. Less focus was on the role of the Islamophobia industry that spent \$42 millions between 2001-2008 in the US alone (Fear Inc., 2015), the gatekeepers controlling this industry, the cultural and private channels that disseminate the materials and the impact this has on our foreign policy, domestic surveillance, sentiments in public, as well as housing and employment spaces.

Such systemic and societal impacts are best understood through research. This reality points to the acute need for academia to increasingly take up Islamophobia as a research topic.

## Have you, or someone you know, experienced Islamophobia?

“ [We have] collective guilt, always having to explain ourselves. Feeling ostracized at school.

“ My clients have expressed systemic Islamophobia in trying to access services, or are fearful to access services. I worked with a Syrian family. Their child’s teacher kept sending him home because he would draw pictures of the war in Syrian. The child got suspended and labelled as a violent child. It was very hard for the family to rebuild connection with the school.

“ My mom got physically attacked in the elevator.

“ She was walking at night and two men started chasing her and mocked her attire. She ended up taking off her hijab. It took her 7-8 years to put it on again.

“ We had recently arrived in [Canada] and my neighbour started to harass us by unleashing his ferocious dog as we passed our front yard. After a few times I told him that I would call the police and this made him stop.

# Recommendations

Even though the community has been facing Islamophobia for almost two decades, the work being done to counter it is still in the early stages.

The following are some key recommendations as a result of this local consultation:

1

M103 was a private members motion with no legal force or effect which sought to explicitly name Islamophobia in its condemnation of systemic racism. The debate over the term “Islamophobia” related to this, in 2017, made it clear that naming the problem faces resistance and is not acknowledged in some sectors. It is therefore recommended that the term **Islamophobia** be specifically used by policy makers, media, political leaders, and the community in general when talking about anti-Muslim hate. Islamophobia should not be glossed over or replaced by using broader terms such as xenophobia and racism.

2

Local institutions, including police, education, municipal governments, etc. should use resources and strategies in an equitable manner for anti-Islamophobia and anti-racism efforts. Successful models of confronting Islamophobia should be replicated across the community. WRCPC’s initiative to hold a community consultation on Islamophobia as part of its work to combat hate crimes is commendable in this regard.

3

Noting the overlap of xenophobia, anti-black racism, anti-indigenous sentiments, Islamophobia, etc., strong connections and solidarity actions should be made between organisations and initiatives that address such issues and try to bring awareness to racism in all its forms and at all levels.

4

With the current interest in wellbeing and social inclusion initiatives in Waterloo region, addressing Islamophobia and all forms of systemic and interpersonal racism through restorative justice approach should be made a top priority.

5

Funders and mainstream organizations should support and assist grassroots groups, like the CMW, to enhance their anti-Islamophobia/anti-racism work. Often the groups that have the most skill and expertise struggle to scale up their efforts due to a lack of resources.

6

Waterloo region is rich in research institutions. Community based research, supported by these local educational institutions, should be conducted to better understand and develop a comprehensive and integrated approach to preventing Islamophobia.

## Next Steps

- ✔ **The formation of a working group that meets regularly and provides a forum to better understand and plan for how to address anti-Muslim hate in Waterloo region.**
- ✔ **This working group will begin by reviewing the above recommendations and works towards their implementation.**
- ✔ **Conducting outreach events for the public to increase their understanding of Islam and Muslims.**
- ✔ **Arranging a workshop for the local media to understand the deep concerns by Muslims and the media’s role in the marginalisation of their community.**

## Conclusion

This consultation was an important first step in addressing Islamophobia in Waterloo region. The keynote speaker, the panel of persons with lived experiences, and the community members' dialogue all came together to fulfill the objectives of education about Islamophobia, and listening to the voices of the community. It became clear that Waterloo region is not immune to the national trends of systemic anti-Muslim racism, discrimination, prejudice, name calling, vandalism, and exclusion and hate crimes.

The Muslim community feels misunderstood by the mischaracterisation of Islam and is hurt by the widespread fear and suspicions they face from the wider community. This in turn damages the social fabric of our community specifically and Canada more generally. The collective guilt placed on the Muslim community for terrorism committed (or allegedly committed) by an individual who happens to share the same faith, takes a toll on their well-being and by extension the well-being of the whole community.

We thank the presenters, WRCPC staff, table facilitators, event volunteers and the participants for making this a safe and brace event.



## Resources

Framing Muslims in the "War on Terror": Representations of Ideological Violence by Muslim versus Non-Muslim Perpetrators in Canadian National News Media  
<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/9/274>

US's \$57 million Islamophobia industry  
<https://islamophobicanetwork.com>

Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project (IRDP), housed at UC Berkeley's Center for Race and Gender  
<https://irdproject.com>

Reported hate crimes tripled in Waterloo Region in 2017  
<https://www.therecord.com/news-story/9064816-reported-hate-crimes-tripled-in-waterloo-region-in-2017>

A national day of remembrance: Lessons from the Quebec massacre, Jasmin Zine  
<https://muslimlink.ca/in-focus/muslim-canadian-day-of-remembrance-quebec-mosque-shooting-massacre-islamophobia-canada>

I had a front-row seat to hate and was physically assaulted: The liberal-washing of white nationalism, Jasmine Zine  
[https://theconversation.com/i-had-a-front-row-seat-to-hate-and-was-physically-assaulted-the-liberal-washing-of-white-nationalism-114002?fbclid=IwAR19QFp07mamzAXne4lFBzd\\_5slQdlm-mk9QceiljdmVunuelPB\\_IMQblow](https://theconversation.com/i-had-a-front-row-seat-to-hate-and-was-physically-assaulted-the-liberal-washing-of-white-nationalism-114002?fbclid=IwAR19QFp07mamzAXne4lFBzd_5slQdlm-mk9QceiljdmVunuelPB_IMQblow)

Fight Islamophobia by repealing draconian national security laws, Stevan Zhou  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/fight-islamophobia-repeal-national-security-laws-1.4020095>

Hate Crimes Project Report (2014) by CMW

Leber, B. (2017). Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2015. Juristat, Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 85-002-X

Environics Institute (2016) Survey of Muslims in Canada  
<https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/project-details/survey-of-muslims-in-canada-2016>

Public Report on the Terrorism Threat to Canada (2018): Public Safety Canada



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