



CREATING EQUITABLE SERVICES FOR MUSLIM WOMEN IN WATERLOO REGION

A Community Needs Assessment

April 2021



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Coalition of
Muslim Women
Kitchener-Waterloo

SECTION 1: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE COALITION OF MUSLIM WOMEN OF KITCHENER-WATERLOO:

Founded by a handful of Muslim women from diverse backgrounds in 2010, Coalition of Muslim Women of KW (CMW) is a charitable organization empowering women and girls to be leaders and change makers. CMW provides opportunities for personal and professional growth, and leadership and skills development for women while addressing issues of gender-based violence, racism, discrimination and Islamophobia through innovative programming and services, partnerships and collaboration, and advocacy and outreach.



For more information visit: <https://cmw-kw.org/>

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SECTION 2: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Community Needs Assessment was to determine the programming needs of Muslim Women within Waterloo Region. This included identifying barriers to access as well as opportunities for improved service delivery. A mixed methods research approach was used to gather information, experiences, and ideas from more than 600 individuals. Data was collected on 6 thematic areas: Employment, Young People, Community Harm and Hate Crimes, Family Harm, Mental Health and Financial Independence. Specific findings are provided for nine cultural and language communities in an effort to reflect the diversity within the Muslim community.

This Community Needs Assessment also sought information, opinions, and ideas from Waterloo Region's service providers. This included organizations providing social services, community services, and cultural and faith-based organizations.

The Coalition of Muslim Women of KW pursued this project not to evaluate and assess their organization's menu of programs, but instead to provide a needs assessment to service providers across the community. The goal was to give voice to Muslim women in Waterloo Region, and allow them to speak to service providers about their experiences, needs, hopes, and wants.

You will hear the voices of the women who participated in this Community Needs Assessment throughout this report – and we do encourage you to take the time to read and reflect on what these women are saying. As the report authors, we were overwhelmed by the amount of data, ideas, and input that we received (and we cannot express enough thanks to the hundreds of Muslim women who participated), and worked hard to organize this overwhelming amount of information while presenting these women's voices as clearly, honestly, and unvarnished as possible. We were fortunate to have many open, brave, and honest conversations with these women, and hope that we have accurately reflected their input.

While reading the full report is required to take in the diverse voices and opinions, for ease of the intended audience – service providers, community groups and

"The biggest challenge is the visible challenge...Layers of clothing, hijab, and automatically assumptions are made about you that you don't speak English, you're not as educated as them, you don't belong. Once you break that barrier, then you still have the barriers of being a woman. The phobias and preconceived notions of oppression, etc. As a Black, Muslim, woman, immigrant, now there are four things against me that feed into what people think I can't do."

-Interviewee

organizations, and institutions such as local municipalities and the police service – the authors have reflected on what we heard from participants, and made general recommendations. It is our hope that these recommendations begin, or contribute to vital conversations in the community. These recommendations are based on the input we received, and are our interpretation of actions that our community can take to better serve Muslim women, and we hope, create a more welcoming, just, and equitable community.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In the [last section of the document](#), you will find the full list of 35 recommendations for the community, with expanded explanations. This condensed list of recommendations is presented here as a high-level summary.

General

- *Mainstream agencies should assess their knowledge- and service-gaps that may lead to an overreliance on grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations, and should:*
 - *Conduct research into the frequency and breadth of support requests made to these organizations.*
 - *Provide financial compensation for the expertise of these organizations.*
 - *Work with religious- and culturally-focused organizations to build a service map to clarify roles and interactions.*
- *Local funders should consider additional resources to support grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations.*

“There’s a lot of dependency on grassroots organizations to do the work that mainstream organizations are getting funding to do. They have that connection [grassroots] but the mainstream doesn’t have that same connection.”

-Interviewee

Access to Service

- *Service providers could locate, engage, or partner with faith communities to offer programs that are ‘endorsed’ by the communities the program aims to serve.*
- *The use of peer support workers to engage isolated communities should be continued and expanded.*
- *A backbone organization should explore increased funding for local interpretation, or an umbrella subscription to telephone interpretation services that could be shared with service providers throughout the community.*

- *Funders and planning tables should continue to examine the geographic distribution of services, and support Cambridge-based organizations to expand supports.*

Community Harm

- *Establish a live reporting number for hate incidents supporting people to report, and provide immediate connection to counselling.*

I always want to make sure service providers align with my values. A lot of the services are not reflective what the Muslim Women needs.”

-Focus Group Participant

Domestic Violence

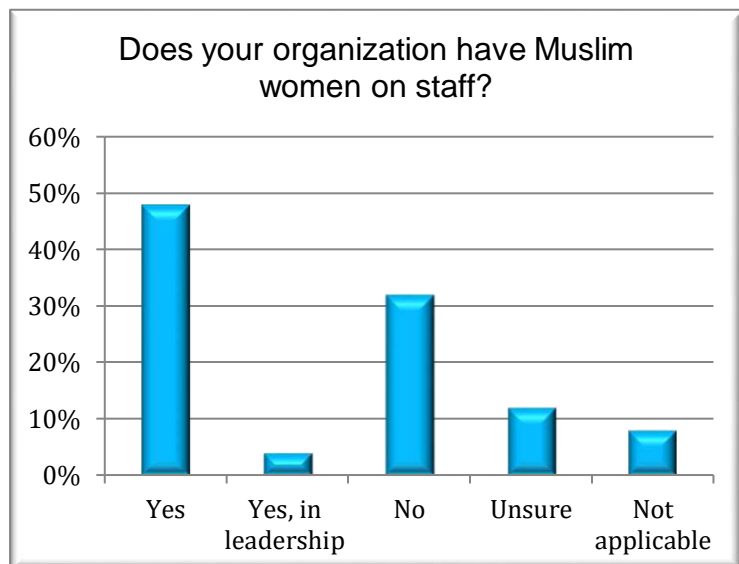
- *Domestic Violence organizations should:*
 - *Establish or partner with a peer worker program to engage diverse communities and increase pathways to support.*
 - *Post photos of what the shelter and its rooms look like, and hold open houses for faith, organization, and community leaders; highlight/clarify if Halal food, prayer room, interpretation, etc. is available.*
- *Service providers should work with grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations to increase social and emotional support groups for separated or divorced Muslim women.*
- *The development of a shelter for Muslim women warrants further study.*

Employment Services

- *Employment service agencies should provide specific resources and programs for clients experiencing workplace discrimination*

Equitable Employment

- *Service providers need to:*
 - *Hire people who are representative of the community.*
 - *Hire Muslim women (and other racialized and marginalized people) for, and promote beyond, front-line roles.*



- *Implement equitable hiring policies and invest in their staff members to position them for advancement.*

Financial Independence

- *Establish a community trustee where women can hold their money separately and confidentially.*

Leadership

- *To support equitable representation on local boards, the community should:*
 - *Establish/support a service in the community that links organizations to BIPOC board members and provides guidance and support to organizations on anti-racism, decolonization, equity, and inclusion.*
 - *Establish an ongoing leadership program to support people from marginalized groups or with lived experience with the knowledge, encouragement, and connections to participate on local boards.*



- *Funders should consider a fund to support people from marginalized groups or with lived experience with resources to participate on local boards.*

Mental Health

- *Mental health service providers should:*
 - *Build stronger partnerships with faith leaders and cultural communities to increase uptake of supports.*
 - *Develop partnerships with professionals and organizations in other communities to increase access to counsellors with shared language, religion, or culture.*
 - *Distribute information about available supports, written in a variety of languages, through local high schools.*
 - *Create a multimedia campaign featuring members of a variety of ethnic/linguistic/religious communities explaining their mental health experience and resources that are available.*

Policing

- *As a start to build strengthened relationships, the Police Service should:*
 - *establish a paid peer navigator program in partnership with grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations.*
 - *establish a direct reporting line for incidences where the police are dismissive, racist, or exhibit prejudice.*
 - *expand efforts to send police to community events to sit and engage with people.*
 - *fund a neutral, arms-length engagement process with ethnic, religious, and language communities to hear concerns and ideas for systemic reforms.*

“Police believe two things about Muslim women. They are dumb and they are traumatized. Police are starting their conversations with these ideas in their minds.”

- Focus Group Participant

Youth

- *Local mental health organizations should distribute information about available supports, written in a variety of languages, through local high schools.*
- *Service providers should work with grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations to offer co-ed or targeted programs that are more comfortable for female youth and their caregivers.*

SECTION 3: RESEARCH METHODS

A mixed methods research approach was used to gather information, experiences, and ideas from the community. The assessment was designed by Common Cause Consulting in collaboration with the Research Advisory Committee made up of the CMW staff. A diverse team of Peer Support Workers provided invaluable input into the design and implementation of the Community Needs Assessment.

We collected information in the following ways:

- an online survey completed by 226 Muslim women
- a phone survey delivered in several languages by trained Peer Support Workers to 249 Muslim women
- 7 online focus groups with Muslim women from several language and cultural communities
- an online focus group with Muslim community leaders
- an online focus group with Peer Support Workers
- an online survey for service providers, completed by 34 community partners
- key informant phone interviews with 8 community partners
- a review of local research and statistics.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all data collection took place by phone or online using Survey Monkey and Zoom. The data was collected between January and February 2021.

The online community survey was promoted via the CMW's e-newsletter, social media accounts, and was also shared by several community partners.



In an effort to reach more isolated Muslim women, we used a team of Peer Support Workers to deliver a shortened version of the survey over the phone in several different languages. The Peer Support Workers were trained and provided with resources on responding to traumatic disclosure. The use of Peer Support Workers to deliver the survey did come with some limitations, such as loss of anonymity, but on the whole, it allowed us to reach a much more diverse sample.

Combined Survey Demographics

The surveys were completed by a total of 475 Muslim women living in Waterloo Region.

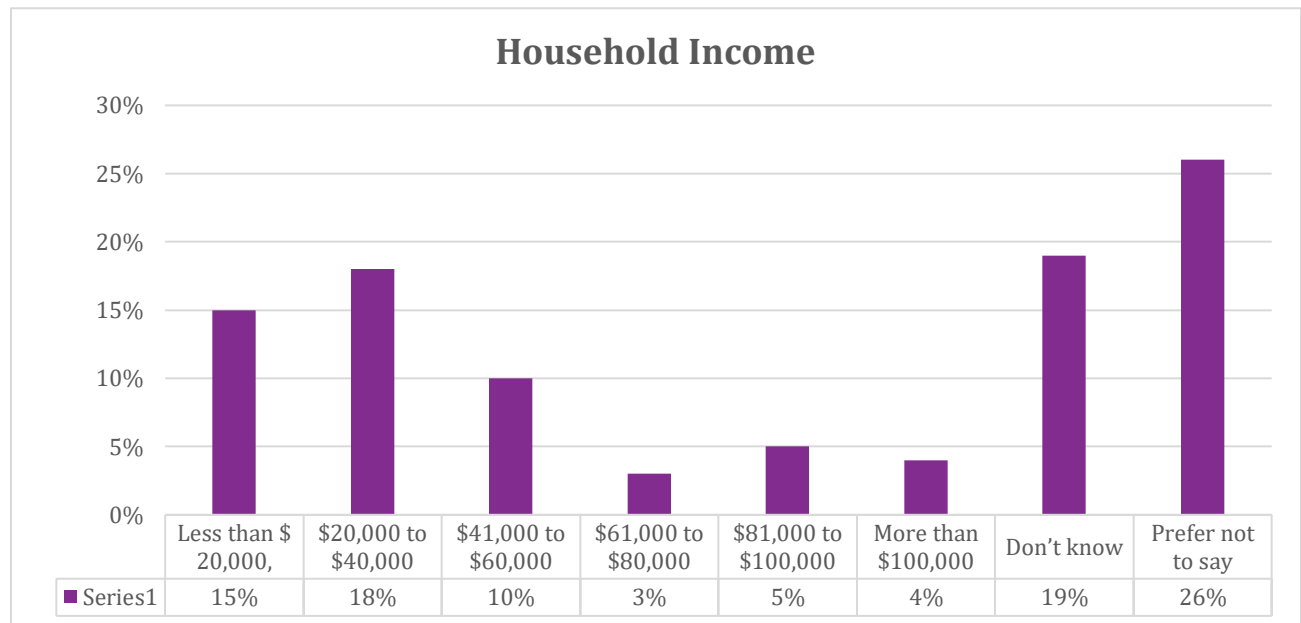
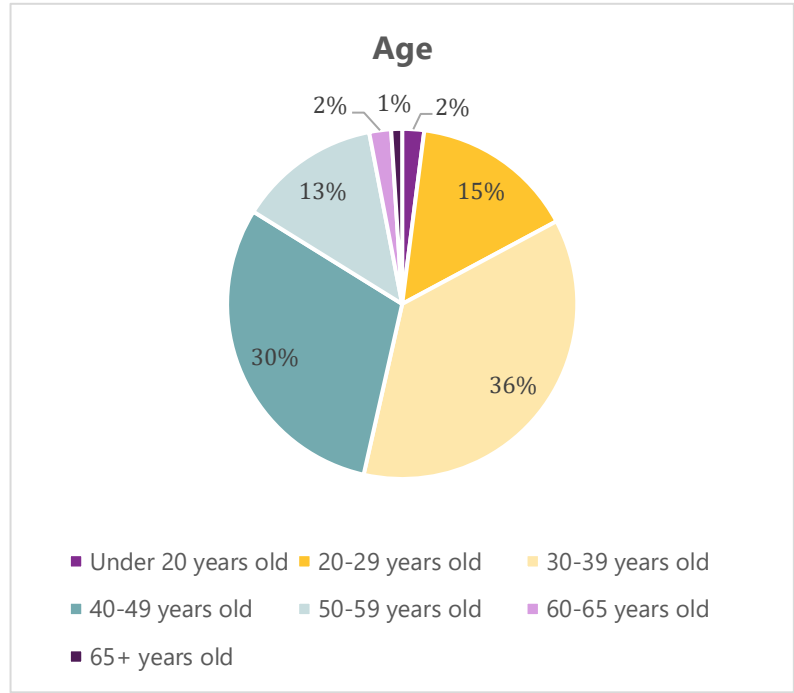
Family Status

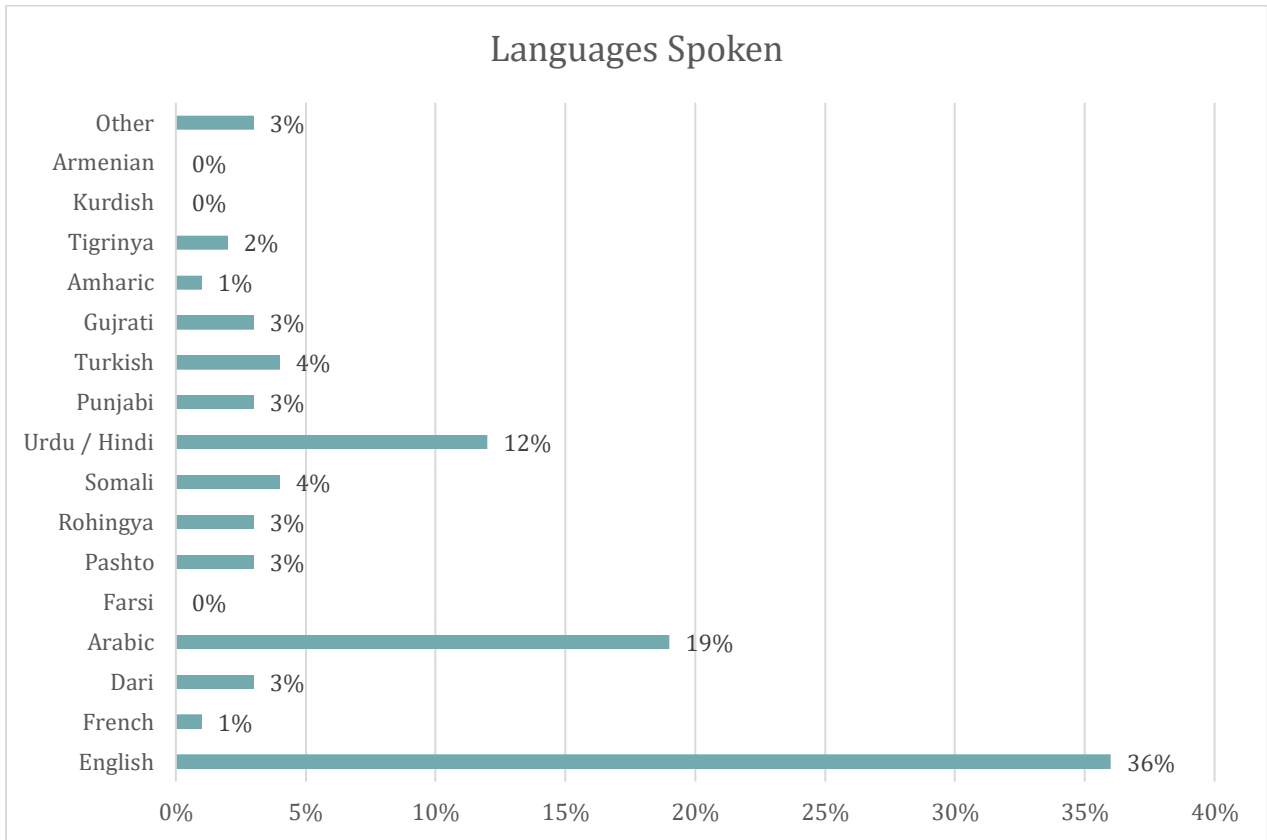
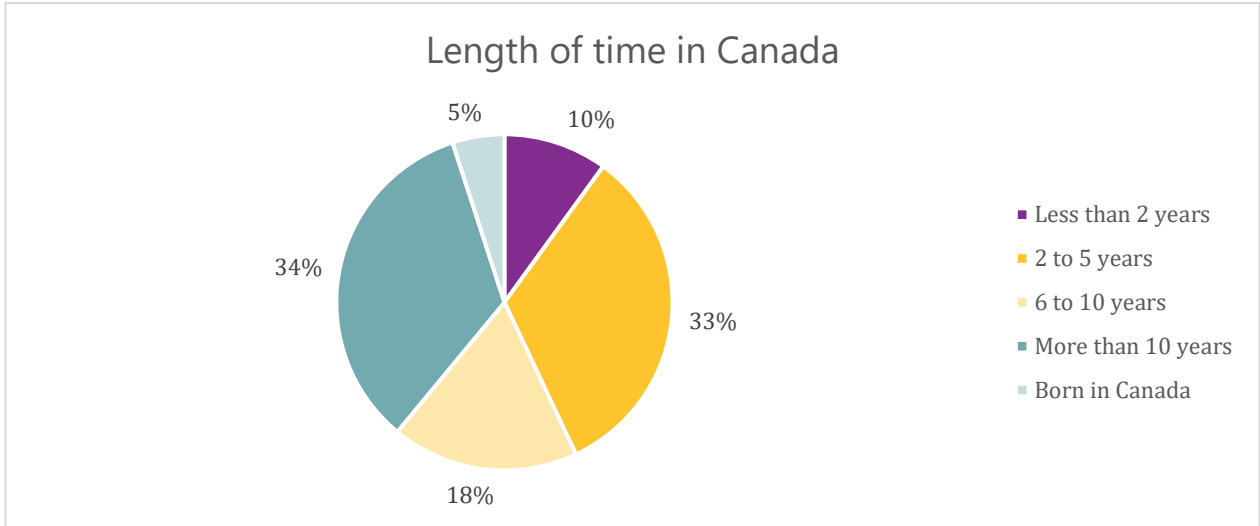
More than three-quarters (77%) of the respondents were married or in a common law or domestic partnership.

17% of participants lived with extended family members.

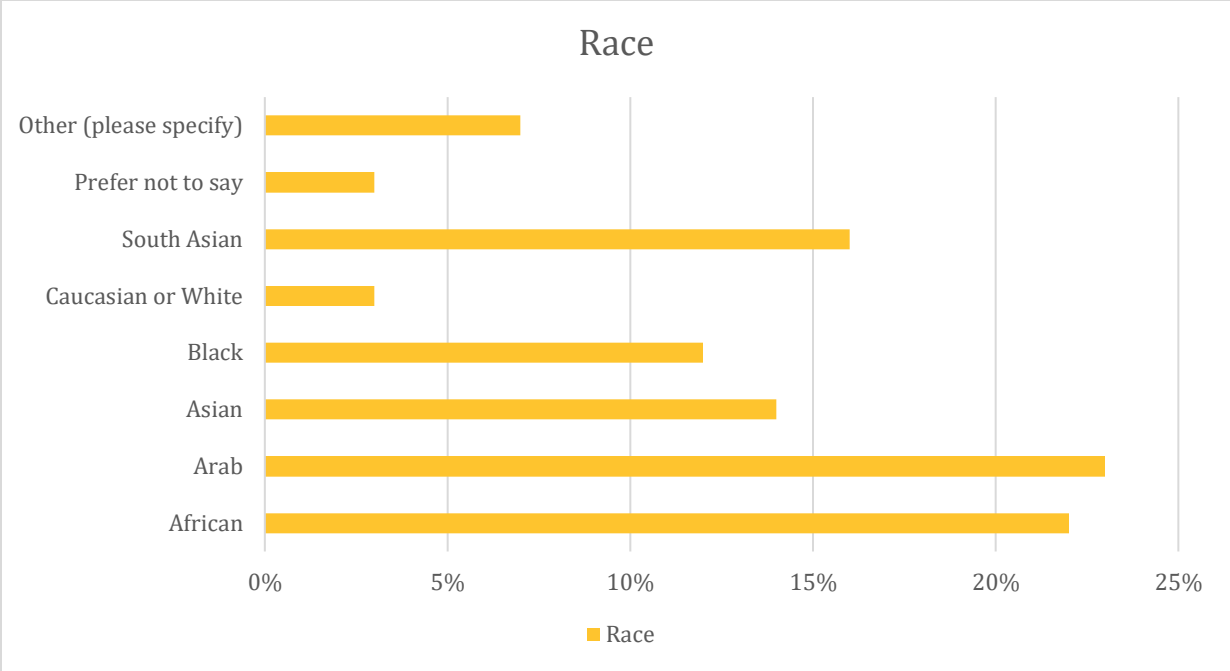
14% of participants did not have children. 28% had 1 or 2 children, 40% had 3 to 4 children and 25% had more than 5 children.

43% of participants had children under 10 and 36% had children between 11 and 19. As the survey did not attempt to engage youth, there were no respondents under the age of 18.

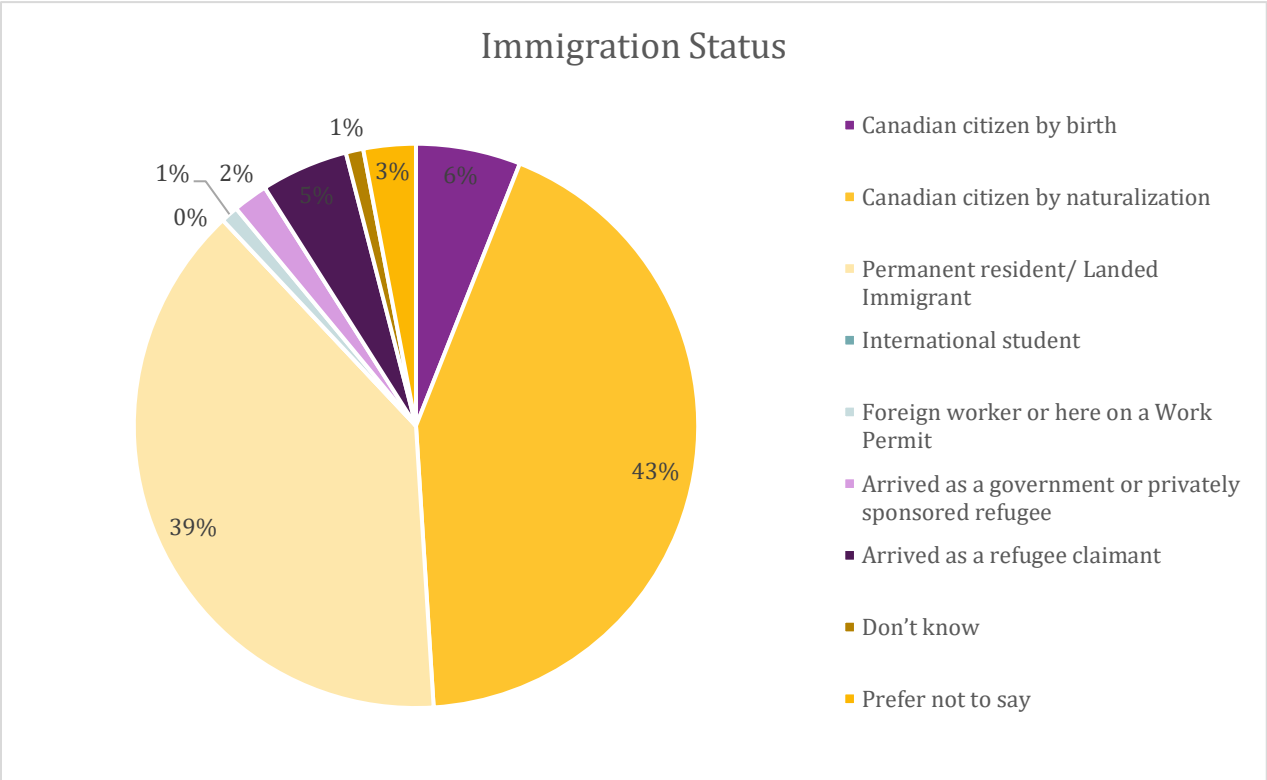




*Respondents were able to select all that apply.



*Respondents were able to select all that apply. Based on other demographics collected we assume that respondents who selected "Asian" are likely to be part of the South Asian community.



Focus Groups

A total of 9 focus groups were completed to provide additional context and validation to our survey findings. Focus group participants were recruited by the Peer Support Workers and the Research Advisory Committee. Simultaneous interpretation was provided in several of the focus groups.

List of focus groups:

- Muslim women from the Iranian community conducted in English with 8 participants
- Muslim women from the Somali community conducted in Somali with 22 participants
- Muslim women from the Ethiopian and Eritrean Community conducted in English with 9 participants
- Muslim women from the African community conducted in English with 3 participants
- Muslim women from various communities conducted in English with 18 participants
- Muslim women from the Gujarati community conducted in Gujarati with 9 participants
- Muslim women from the Pashto community conducted in Pashto with 7 participants
- Community leaders conducted in English with 10 participants
- Peer support workers conducted in English with 10 participants.



Service Provider Methods

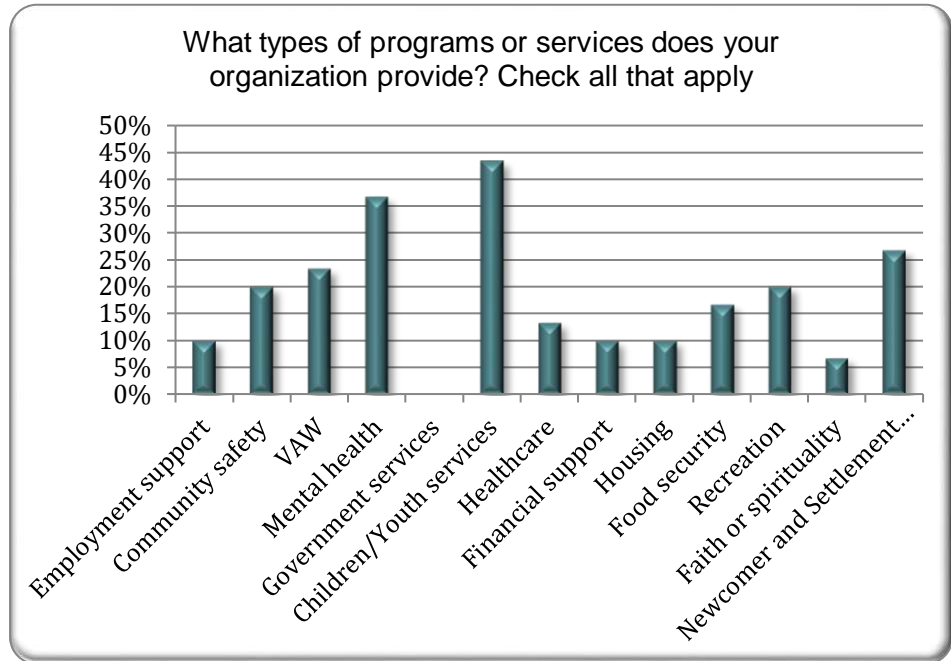
In addition to the extensive data collection conducted with Muslim women in Waterloo Region, this Community Needs Assessment also sought information, opinions, and ideas from Waterloo Region's service providers. This includes organizations providing social services, community services, ethnocultural organizations, and Islamic faith communities. This information was collected through an online survey and through key informant interviews.

The Research Advisory Committee selected organizations from a variety of sectors who were invited to complete the online survey. The online survey was also shared through various service provider networks, and on social media. A total of 34 responses were received from the online survey, with respondents from a wide variety of organizations (see chart) responding. The majority of respondents who marked "other" were multi-service agencies indicating a wide variety of programs.

Of the respondents to the survey and interviews, 67% were from management (coordinator to executive director); 21% were non-management; and 13% did not answer. 100% of all respondents had at least some knowledge or awareness of the Coalition of Muslim Women.

In addition to the survey, several organizations selected by the Research Advisory Committee were invited to participate in telephone/video conference interviews, where probing questions could be asked to dig deeper into the topics. A dozen organizations were invited to participate, with a total of 8 interviews conducted. Of those interviews, two respondents worked for organizations

focused on Gender-Based Violence; one within Newcomer and Settlement services; two ethnocultural organizations; one municipal community service respondent; one early learning organization; and one multi-service social and community support agency.



SECTION 4: FINDINGS FROM MUSLIM WOMEN BY THEME

This Community Needs Assessment focused on the program and service needs of Muslim women related to 6 themes:

- Employment
- Young People
- Community Harm and Hate Crimes
- Family Harm
- Mental Health
- Financial Independence

We refer to those who completed the survey as 'respondents' and those who took part in the focus groups as 'participants.'

EMPLOYMENT

Employment services were defined as:

- helping to write resumes, practicing interviews, and job search support
- working with temp agencies
- getting, keeping, and succeeding in their job
- dealing with discrimination, racism, and harassment at work or during the job search
- making an employment related complaint with a Human Resources Department or Union.

"In my case, I was a graduate of a [Canadian Community College] and was a great student, with distinction. I had many years working with seniors. For a year I applied everywhere and didn't even get one interview. I went to the Working Centre to see if it was an issue with my resume, and they said no, I shouldn't change one word. They were shocked as to why I didn't get a single interview. It is hard to find a job. After one year, I got a casual job, 9 hours biweekly, but at the place I wanted."

-Focus Group Participant

Just over a third of our participants did not know where they could go for employment-related assistance. For those who could identify an organization, most of our project's participants would contact organizations that specifically served immigrants such as the YMCA or KW Multicultural Centre. Many participants also mentioned the Working Centre as a key source for employment related support and some discussed positive aspects of their programs during our focus groups.

Many focus group participants indicated the importance of language skills training, vocational training, and support for highly skilled immigrants in having their qualifications recognized.

Focus group participants reported widespread discrimination in seeking and maintaining employment. Many recalled incidents of gendered Islamophobia and not having their credentials or experience recognized. Many shared that they had to volunteer for years before securing employment, often at a lower level than their credentials and experience warranted.

Our respondents indicated that employment-related services could be improved by:

- offering interpretation
- offering affordable or free services
- clearly explaining the service
- offering childcare at the location
- offering support on how to deal with employment-related discrimination, such as Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, and sexism.



“There is discrimination, we need to point this out for sure. I see this happen many times, where they get a good response on the phone, but in person, it was a totally different response. As soon as they realized okay, this lady is not from here. This discrimination is experienced from women from all different countries, very skilled and experienced. They also of course look at the name on the resume.”

-Focus Group Participant

When asked about barriers to accessing employment related assistance, the top reasons were:

- not knowing where to go for help
- not believing that the services could actually help them
- fear of being misunderstood due to language.

A quarter of our survey respondents would prefer to use a Muslim-specific organization when seeking employment related assistance. 16% of respondents would contact an organization with some staff who shared their language or background and just over half of the respondents (54%) would contact the organization with the

best programs and resources for their situation regardless of the staff's language or background. 5% would not contact an organization if they needed help with an employment issue.

One trend that was consistent in all Focus Groups was the lack of hesitation in seeking support related to employment, compared to seeking support for more stigmatized issues such as mental health and domestic and community violence. In general, participants felt comfortable seeking support for employment and confident in their service choices.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Services for young people (aged 13 to 20 years old) were defined as:

- recreational programs, such as sports and arts programs
- social and emotional supports such as counselling or peer programs for youth
- educational, training and employment support for youth
- supports for challenging and concerning behaviour by young people.

"I think both culture and religion are important. I think with my kids, I see some differences between what I expect of my child, and what is normal in our community here. It's important to me if I talk to a counsellor, or my child does that they understand our expectations."

- Focus Group Participant

Nearly half of the survey respondents did not know where to go if they needed support for a young person in their lives. For those who could identify somewhere to go, half of the participants would turn to family or friends. Just over a third would turn to either Muslim specific-agencies or mainstream community services. Approximately 20% would turn to Family and Children's Services.

During our focus groups, participants listed Carizon, Family and Children's Services, schools, SHORE Centre, YWCA Cambridge and healthcare providers as sources for support for youth. Participants shared that there is a lot of pressure on youth from their cultural community and parents are often not aware of the mental health and addiction challenges young people are facing.

Respondents indicated that services for young people could be improved by:

- having staff who respect and understand their culture and religion
- clearly explaining the service

- having staff who speak their language or share their cultural background
- offering gender-specific programs where Muslim girls may feel more comfortable participating in sports and recreation (e.g. swimming).

When asked about barriers to accessing support for a young person, the top reasons were:

- not knowing where to go for help
- belief that the issue should be dealt with privately within the family
- not believing that the services could actually help them.

Just over a third of participants would prefer to go to a Muslim-specific agency when seeking support for a young person. 12% of respondents would contact an organization with some staff who shared their language or background and half of the respondents (49%) would contact the organization with the best programs and resources for their situation regardless of the staff's language or background. 5% of respondents would not contact an organization if they were having issues with a young person in their life.

COMMUNITY HARM AND HATE CRIMES

Community harm was defined as being harmed by someone out in the community, such as while at work, while shopping, while on the bus, or just out walking. This includes:

- physical assault, such as being hit, pushed, grabbed, spitting, throwing things, pulling their hijab or slapped
- verbal assault/ harassment, such as being called names, being ignored, threatened or yelled at
- sexual assault, such as being touched when you don't want to be, pulling their hijab or being whistled at by a stranger
- hate incidents, such as being called a "terrorist," being told to go back to their country, or destroying or defacing their property or belongings
- intimidation or feeling unsafe when out in the community.

"I know that my family is not going to judge me, but it is humiliating. It is difficult to share with family members. And the need to feel strong, it is hard to share with someone."

- Focus Group Participant reflecting on reporting hate crimes.

The majority of participants indicated that they would first contact the police if they were harmed in the community, followed by family or friends. During our focus groups, most participants indicated that it was important to contact the police, but that in the majority of

cases, hate incidents are not reported. Some participants shared that they knew they should contact the police, but weren't sure they would. The main reasons for not contacting the police was a lack of faith that anything would be done about it and that it would not be taken seriously.

Of respondents who indicated that they had contacted the police in the past due to being harmed in the community, 73% indicated that the police were only able to help somewhat (50%) or not at all (23%). When asked how the police service could be improved, top responses included:

- offer a support worker or peer who spoke their language or shared their cultural background
- explain more clearly what to expect from their services and how the process would unfold
- respect their cultural background, values, and religion
- offer interpretation services.

During our focus groups many participants indicated that they would report hate incidents and seek support from the Coalition of Muslim Women of KW and spoke very highly of their programs and services. Muslim Social Services was also noted as a source of support when you have experienced a hate crime. Some participants discussed the concept of a hate crime helpline that could be called immediately after an incident, where the victim could be supported through reporting the incident, as well as be referred to other supports such as trauma counselling.



Our respondents indicated that services for community harm and hate crimes could be improved by:

- clearly explaining the service
- offering interpretation
- having staff who spoke their language or shared culture
- having staff who understood and respected their religion and culture.

When asked about barriers to accessing support when harmed in the community, the top reasons were:

- don't know where to go for help
- don't want to be judged or shamed by extended family or community members
- it's better to deal with the issue in the family
- don't think they can actually help.

"Their first reaction is shock. When I've had previous experiences I've just tried to let it go, and I carry these bad feelings about this happening to me. I know this isn't the best option but I don't have an answer to it."

- Focus Group Participant

37% of our survey respondents would prefer to use a Muslim-specific organization when seeking support. 13% of respondents would contact an organization with some staff who shared their language or background and 44% of the respondents would contact the organization with the best programs and resources for their situation regardless of the staff's language or background. 6% would not contact an organization if they were harmed in the community.

FAMILY HARM

Family harm was defined as:

- physical harm, such as being hit, pushed, choked, throwing things, or slapped by a family member
- emotional harm, such as being called names, being ignored, threatened, or yelled at by a family member
- sexual harm such as being touched when you don't want to be or having to touch someone when you don't want to by a family member
- financial harm, such as having their income or savings controlled by a family member

The majority of respondents indicated that they would first contact the police if they were harmed by a family member, followed by family or friends. About a third of respondents indicated that they would contact Women's Crisis Services. Many of the focus group participants had not heard of Women's Crisis Services or were under the impression that it was similar to a homeless shelter and would not be a good place to bring children. Of participants familiar with Women's Crisis Services, many mentioned that it was a welcoming place for Muslim women and their families, but not well known. Some focus group participants supported the development of a shelter for Muslim women, such as Nisa Homes in Mississauga and Sakeenah Homes in London (Ontario), in Waterloo Region, in Waterloo Region.

During our focus groups, most participants indicated that they thought that the police should be contacted in cases of domestic violence, but reflected that it was very unlikely to occur. Some barriers or fears of contacting the police included:

- not being understood due to language barriers
- fear of the police
- fear that the family would be broken up
- fear that children would be apprehended
- negative impact on them or their husband's immigration status (fear of deportation)
- fear that involving the police would make the violence worse
- dependence on their husband's income and language skills to get by
- fear that involving the police would lead them to lose control of the situation.



Our respondents indicated that services for family harm could be improved by:

- offering a support worker or peer who spoke their language or shared their culture
- staff who understood and respected culture and religion
- offering free services.

When asked about barriers to accessing support when harmed in the family, the top reasons selected by respondents were:

- don't know where to go for help
- don't want to be judged or shamed by extended family or community members
- it's better to deal with the issue in the family.

This final point – 'it's better to deal with the issue in the family' – was reinforced in focus groups, where many participants indicated they would involve a family member (such as a brother or other male friend to talk to the perpetrator), a friend or community member, or a faith leader such as an Imam.

35% of survey respondents indicated that they would prefer to go to a Muslim-specific agency when seeking help for harm in the family. 18% of respondents would contact an organization with some staff who shared their language or background and 39% of the respondents would

contact the organization with the best programs and resources for their situation regardless of the staff's language or background. 9% would not contact an organization if they were being harmed within their family.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health was defined as:

- feeling stressed, anxious, sad, hopeless, exhausted or grief
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), postpartum depression, bi-polar disorder, and eating disorders
- addiction to drugs, alcohol, gambling, smoking, gaming, screens or other addiction issues
- thoughts of self-harm, cutting, or suicide.

Nearly half of survey respondents did not know where to go for mental health services. For respondents who could identify somewhere, the top choices were their healthcare provider or a counsellor. This was followed by family and friends and mainstream mental health agencies.

"It would help if the Masjid and religious organizations would promote or endorse services. That would make people feel more comfortable as someone from their own cultural background is telling them that it is ok to use these services. You won't be in trouble and there is nothing to be ashamed of."

-Focus Group Participant

Our respondents indicated that mental health services could be improved by:

- offering support or peer workers who spoke language or shared cultural background
- staff understanding and respecting culture and religion
- offering free services
- offering programs to help deal with racism, discrimination and harassment.

Participants in the focus groups indicated that seeking support with mental health, along with domestic violence, carried a strong stigma in their communities. Many participants indicated that having supports located within, or at least

endorsed by, mosques and religious leaders would go a long way towards reducing this stigma. Some participants felt they would be more comfortable seeking support from a professional (such as a counsellor) who shared their language, religious, or cultural background. Other participants agreed, but noted they would be concerned engaging with someone from their language or cultural community since it would be likely that that local professional would be

connected to them socially. Many participants agreed that they would prefer to connect with a professional who shared their background, but lived in another area such as the GTA.

When asked about barriers to accessing mental health supports, the top reasons were:

- don't know where to go for help
- don't want to be judged or shamed by extended family or community members
- concerned it may harm their family members, such as criminal charges or child apprehension.

34% of survey respondents indicated that they would prefer to go to a Muslim-specific agency when seeking mental health supports. 16% of respondents would contact an organization with some staff who shared their language or background and 42% of the respondents would contact the organization with the best programs and resources for their situation regardless of the staff's language or background. 8% would not contact an organization if they needed mental health support.

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

A series of questions were asked to determine levels of financial independence and to identify any related service needs.

80% of respondents reported that they understood their financial situation, such as their income, bills, savings, and debt. 96% of respondents indicated that they have a say in the day to day financial decisions in their family with 85% indicating that they have a say in the major financial decisions within their family. 83% of respondents have access to their family's bank account and can take money out if needed to. 69% have their own savings either in a bank account in their name or cash they have saved.



25% of survey respondents indicated that they would prefer to go to a Muslim-specific agency when seeking help understanding their finances. 13% of respondents would contact an organization with some staff who shared their language or background, and 50% of the respondents would contact the organization with the best programs and resources for their

situation regardless of the staff's language or background. 11% would not contact an organization if they needed help understanding their finances.

RESULTS SPECIFIC TO PARTICIPANTS CONTACTED BY PEER SUPPORT WORKERS

Respondents who completed the survey in their own language over the phone with the assistance of a Peer Support worker were asked some broader questions related to accessing support in the community. To complete this survey, the Project Team relied on 12 peer support workers employed by the Coalition of Muslim Women. These peer support workers have been engaging their own language and cultural communities to increase access to supports and services during the pandemic. This group of survey respondents tended to be more socially and culturally isolated, and likely to have arrived in Canada within the last five years.

Only 65% of respondents thought that there were organizations, services, agencies or groups in the community that could help them if they were in need.

The main barriers to accessing support included:

- not knowing where to go for help (61%)
- fear of being misunderstood due to language (45%) or religion (30%)
- belief that it is better to deal with issues within the family (31%)
- fear of being judged or shamed by extended family or community members (29%).

When seeking support generally, 25% of respondents indicated that they would prefer to contact a Muslim-specific agency. 33% would contact an organization with some staff who shared their language or background, and 38% would contact the organization with the best programs and resources for their situation regardless of the staff's language or background. Only 3% of respondents indicated that they would not seek support.

SECTION 5: FINDINGS BY CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE GROUPS

In this section we have broken down our findings based on the various cultural and language groups represented within the needs assessment.

We recognize the tremendous diversity among Muslim women living in Waterloo Region. As a research group, our goal was to allow for as many distinctions as possible, and specific efforts were made to reach out to several cultural and language groups. Unfortunately, as the sample size of some groups was quite small, we were unable to do a fulsome analysis for every group. We have included the data that could be shared with the hopes that further study can be completed in the future.



Please note that these groups are not mutually exclusive and contain overlaps; for instance, we have sections for both African Muslim women and Somali Muslim women, and we recognize that many cultural groups would identify as Arabic speaking.

AFRICAN

A total of 93 survey respondents identified as African. There were 3 participants in the general African focus group.

Employment

Most respondents listed Immigrant-serving and mainstream employment agencies as sources for employment-related assistance. 52% of respondents could not list a source of support. The focus group participants reported the YMCA, KW Multicultural Centre, and the Working Centre as good sources of support.

Young People

Most respondents identified family or friends, and Muslim-specific organizations as sources for support for young people. Participants indicated that members of their cultural community may be reluctant to seek mental health support for a young person in their family because it is very stigmatized and may affect marriage prospects.

Community Harm and Hate Crimes

The main sources for support from community harm were the police followed by family and friends and a community hotline. Participants indicated they could contact the CMW to document hate crimes and would contact the police if they were injured.

Family Harm

Most respondents listed the police as a source of support for family harm, followed by family or friends. However, the focus group participants indicated that most women from their cultural community would not turn to the police unless it was extremely serious and they were willing to break up the family. Participants indicated that they were more likely to contact religious leaders and extended family for support.



Mental Health

The main source of support for mental health needs were counsellors, social workers and healthcare providers, and community mental health agencies. 71% of survey respondents could not name a source of mental health support. Participants shared that mental health issues are often ignored and it is very stigmatized within their cultural community. Respondents indicated that mental health services could be improved if their staff respected their cultural background, values, and religion.

Access to Services

53% of survey respondents believed that there were organizations in the community that could help them if they were in need. They indicated that organizations could do a better job at supporting Muslim women if they:

- offer a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background
- offer interpretation
- offer programs about how to deal with racism, discrimination, and harassment in their life
- staff respected and understood their cultural background, values, and religion
- offer bus tickets
- offer childcare at the location.

40% of respondents indicated that the main barrier to seeking help was fear of not being treated fairly due to their race, followed closely by those who feared they would be misunderstood due to their language (39%) or not treated fairly due to their religion (38%).

23% of respondents said they would prefer to contact an organization that works mostly with Muslim women, with 31% willing to contact an organization with some staff who can speak their language or share their background. 45% of the survey respondents would contact a mainstream agency.

ARABIC SPEAKING

A total of 110 survey respondents indicated that they spoke the Arabic language.

Employment

Most respondents listed Immigrant-serving and mainstream community organizations as sources for employment-related assistance. The respondents indicated that offering more affordable or free services or childcare on site would improve employment-related services. The main barrier to accessing support was not believing that the services could actually help them.

Young People

Most respondents identified family and friends, Muslim-specific agencies, and mainstream community agencies as sources for support for young people. 65% of respondents did not know where they could go for support for a young person. The main ways youth services could be improved were:

- explain more clearly what to expect from their services
- respect cultural background, values, and religion
- offer free or more affordable services
- offered programs to help youth deal with racism, discrimination and harassment.

Community Harm and Hate Crimes

Most respondents listed the police as a source of support for community harm, followed by family or friends.

The main ways these services could be improved were:

- offer interpretation
- respect cultural background, values, and religion
- explain more clearly what to expect from their services.

Family Harm

Most respondents listed family and friends, followed by the police and counsellors as sources of support for family harm.

Mental Health

The main source of support for mental health needs were healthcare providers and counsellors.

Respondents indicated that mental health services could be improved by having staff who understood and respected their cultural background, values, and religion.



Access to Services

70% of survey respondents believed that there were organizations in the community that could help them if they were in need. They indicated that organizations could do a better job at supporting Muslim women if they:

- offer interpretation
- respect cultural background, values, and religion
- offer programs and services in their language
- offer free or more affordable services.

48% of respondents indicated that the main barrier to seeking help was fear of not being understood due to their language, with 45% believing that it is better to deal with issues within the family. 23% of respondents said they would prefer to contact an organization that works mostly with Muslim women, with 41% willing to contact an organization with some staff who can speak their language or share their background. 32% of the survey respondents would contact a mainstream agency.

ETHIOPIAN AND ERITREAN COMMUNITIES

A total of 9 participants attended the focus group via Zoom. A total of 16 survey respondents indicated that they spoke Amharic or Tigrinya.

Family Violence

When discussing how best to support a friend experiencing domestic violence, participants disagreed over whether or not to encourage her to contact the police. There were fears that by calling the police it may lead to the breakdown of the family and children may be apprehended.

Some participants suggested contacting community or religious leaders who could speak to the friend's husband, although there were fears this may lead to retaliation against the victim. 88% of survey respondents listed family or friends as sources of support. There were also fears with loss of privacy and confidentiality if they asked for support from community members.

The participants spoke very positively of Women's Crisis Services' shelters with one participant reporting that it was welcoming to both Black women and Muslim women. Some examples of how the shelter was welcoming were that it offered Halal food, was respectful of diverse religions, provided free transportation, and they won't force you to contact the police. More than three-quarters (77%) of survey respondents listed the women's shelter as a source of support.

Carizon was also noted as a good source for emotional support.

Young People

Participants indicated that they would contact their family doctor or a mainstream counselling agency if they needed mental health support. Most of our survey respondents could list a place they could go to access support. KW Counselling, Carizon and Here 24/7 were named as good sources of support.

Community Harm and Hate Crimes

When discussing a scenario where a stranger tries to rip off their hijab, many participants indicated that they would be reluctant to contact the police. They discussed having a phobia of the police due to experiences from their home countries, fear of being misunderstood, and a general sense of mistrust. One woman added that when she sees the police, she starts shaking.

"I would not report [the hate crime] to the police because if he wasn't in uniform, the police officer might do the same thing."

.....
-Participant in Ethiopian and Eritrean Focus Group

One participant shared the experience of a recent newcomer from Africa who did not speak any English who was picked up by the police while he was outside walking in his neighbourhood. He was placed in the backseat of the patrol car and driven home. They did not offer him an interpreter and he had no idea why he was picked up. The incident really frightened his entire family.

Employment

When discussing finding work, participants highlighted the importance of volunteering in order to gain 'Canadian experience' and to build a network.

Both the Working Centre and the KW Multicultural Centre were identified as good sources of employment-related support. Most of the survey respondents did not know where they could go to access support.

The participants indicated that discrimination was a major barrier to finding quality employment, and shared that despite having Canadian degrees it was very difficult to secure anything other than minimum wage or physical labour jobs.

Access to Services

Throughout the focus group, participants spoke of informal peer support networks where members with more experience support newer immigrants. Prior to COVID-19, the community regularly would host get-togethers to welcome and support newcomers. They share support via WhatsApp groups.

The participants also spoke of meeting at the Family Centre and participating in programs there. They also host community picnics and religious celebrations.

Respondents in our survey indicated that organizations could do a better job at supporting Muslim women if they:

- offer interpretation
- offer a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background
- respect their cultural background, values, and religion
- offer bus tickets
- offer programs about how to deal with racism, discrimination, and harassment in their life.

When seeking support 31% of survey respondents would prefer to contact a Muslim-specific organization. 46% would contact an organization with some staff who can speak their language or share their background, and 23% would contact the organization with the best programs and resources for their situation regardless of the staff's language or background.

GUJARATI

A total of 19 survey respondents indicated that they spoke the Gujarati language. There were 9 participants in the Gujarati focus group.

Employment

Most respondents listed Immigrant-serving service providers or family and friends as sources of employment-related support. 39% of respondents could not name any source for support. Focus group members shared that even with experience and Canadian degrees they are unable to secure stable employment. They are often encouraged to volunteer to gain 'Canadian experience' and build their network.

Young People

Most respondents identified mainstream agencies or schools as sources for support for young people. 56% of respondents could not name any sources for support. Focus group participants indicated they would be reluctant to seek professional support for a young person in their life because the community may find out and judge them.

Community Harm and Hate Crimes

Most respondents listed the police and family and friends as sources of support for community harm. Focus group participants indicated that they did not think that the police would be able to do anything if they experienced a hate crime.

Family Harm

Most respondents listed the police and family and friends as a source of support for family harm. However, focus group participants indicated that it was unlikely that women from their cultural community would contact the police. The main barrier was fear of breaking up the family and judgement from the community. Participants said it would be better to talk to someone who understands and respects their culture.

Mental Health

The main source of support for mental health needs listed by survey respondents was healthcare providers. Focus group participants indicated serious concerns around confidentiality and trusting service providers who were from their cultural community. Participants shared that there was a lot of stigma surrounding mental health and it is a major barrier to accessing support.

Access to Services

55% of survey respondents believed that there were organizations in the community that could help them if they were in need. They indicated that organizations could do a better job at supporting Muslim women if they:

- offer free or more affordable services
- offer rides
- offer interpretation

"But we volunteer for years and we still can't get a job, even with a Canadian degree. Volunteering will give you experience and you can search for jobs on Indeed and Monster website. She can work at Walmart at least to support family."

-Gujrati Focus Group Participant

- offer a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background
- offer staff who understood and respected their cultural background, values, and religion
- offer programs and services in their language.

53% of respondents indicated that the main barrier to seeking help was fear of not being understood due to their language.

33% of respondents said they would prefer to contact an organization that works mostly with Muslim women, with 22% willing to contact an organization with some staff who can speak their language or share their background. 39% of the survey

respondents would contact a mainstream agency. 6% of respondents indicated that they would not seek help.

“If she calls the police they will charge her husband and she will be left in a shelter with no money. If she wants to drop the charges the police will not drop them and her family will be destroyed. No husband will take this insult and pressure from the police. He won’t go back to his wife again. Police are not flexible. The husband will lose his job if he is charged. One must find cultural help and communication therapy counselling from elders or the same kind of people.”

-Gujarati Focus Group Participant



IRANIAN COMMUNITY

A total of 8 participants attended the Iranian focus group. The discussion took place in English.

Family Harm

Most participants agreed that it was unlikely that women from their cultural community would contact the police if they were experiencing domestic violence unless it was very serious. Their main concern was that contacting the police may lead to criminal charges which could jeopardize their immigration status. They were more likely to explore counselling options, however they noted that there were very few Farsi-speaking counsellors in the region. Due to concerns with privacy, it was noted that some victims may be more likely to access counselling outside the region. The Family Outreach Program and Settlement

Program were identified as good sources of support because they are familiar with the resources and the importance of confidentiality. Here 24/7 and KW Counselling were also identified as options.

Most participants were aware of Women's Crisis Services' shelters and spoke very positively about their outreach program. They were confident that they provided free interpretation and their services were confidential.

The Nisa Homes shelter was highlighted a good model for supporting Muslim women experiencing domestic violence. However, participants pointed out the downside to having a Muslim-specific shelter is that the broader community may see Islam as linked to violence.

The participants indicated that they would not suggest going to the Imam or a religious leader because they may not be trained in domestic violence or marriage counselling.

Community Harm and Hate Crimes

Most participants agreed that they would contact the police if they were harmed in the community, however, they noted that most of these incidents are not reported and the experience is widespread within their cultural community.

The participants discussed the need for emotional support following hate incidents. Having someone to talk to while they are still in shock to help them process what happened and connect with resources.

"Once it happened to me, and I know all of the resources, but it took me a long time to call police. Because you always think, did I do something wrong?"

-Iranian Focus Group Participant
reflecting on experiencing a Hate
Crime

Young People

Most survey respondents indicated that they would turn to family or friends if they needed help for a young person. This was followed by their healthcare provider, Family and Children's Services, and the police.

When discussing support for young people, focus group participants were able to identify Open Door and Here 24/7. They also added that the school is a great option because there are counsellors at the school and they could arrange for a meeting with the child psychologist.

The participants indicated that family members may not recognize if a young person is struggling and they may have the mentality that, "We had a worse situation than you growing up - so you have no reason to be depressed."

Mental Health

When discussing barriers to accessing mental health supports, participants identified that there is a lot of shame and taboo surrounding mental health within their cultural community. There is also a lack of culturally aware counselling options.

Employment

Many focus group participants reported experiencing discrimination related to employment. Specifically, during the job search process.

Participants discussed the barriers to entrepreneurship for Muslim women. They indicated that the Working Centre used to have a great program for this. They also suggested the Conestoga Career Centre and Waterloo Region Small Business Centre and Velocity and Communitech for tech related businesses. The participants indicated that these resources are working on respecting diversity, but still have more to do to become welcoming to Muslim Women.

"I've heard of women who will take their hijab off to get the job. Some people found it was the only option when they want to work."

-Iranian Focus Group Participant

PASHTO

The 7 participants in the Pashto language focus group were all originally from Pakistan and mostly living in the Cambridge area. Many had lived in Canada for more than 10 years. A total of 19 of the survey respondents spoke Pashto.

Family Harm

Participants expressed limited knowledge of mainstream community organizations or services. When discussing domestic violence, the main response was to contact the police. There was an expectation that the police would provide appropriate referrals for counselling and support. Some of the participants had heard of a woman from their community who went to a woman's shelter and had a positive experience, but they did not know the name of the shelter or how they could access it if needed without calling the police.

They indicated that they would not be comfortable speaking to a counsellor from outside their community.

Mental Health

Most participants were not aware of any mental health agencies or support services beyond contacting their family doctor. They indicated that there was a lack of support programs for youth from their community, especially in the Cambridge-area.

100% of the survey respondents listed their family or friends as the main source of support for mental health, followed by the police (69%) and Muslim-specific organizations (31%)

Community Harm and Hate Crimes

100% of the survey respondents would turn to the police, followed by family or friends (70%) if they were harmed in the community. Many focus group participants had indicated they had experienced hate-related street harassment and even serious physical violence. When describing reporting hate-related incidents to the police in the past, they indicated that the incidents had been brushed off. They reported that hate-related incidents have declined in recent years and that it had been much worse right after 9/11.

Employment

Most of the survey respondents were aware of several sources of employment-related support, with the top choices being family or friends or a mainstream community organization.

When discussing employment, there was widespread agreement that Muslim women are treated unfairly, as prospective employees, workers, and business owners. They discussed being told that they are overqualified, but at the same time do not have enough 'Canadian experience.' They discussed the need for more opportunities for working from home and being involved in the community.

Access to services

Most survey respondents believed that there were organizations in the community that could help them if they were in need. They indicated that organizations could do a better job at supporting Muslim women if they:

- offer a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background

"Although diversity is at the core of these places, it is not what happens in practice. I appreciate what they are intending to respect diversity, but I don't see that there. There is still a long way to go."

-Focus Group Participant

- respect their cultural background, values, and religion
- offer interpretation
- offer programs about how to deal with racism, discrimination and harassment in their life.

80% of respondents indicated that the main barrier to seeking help was their belief that it is better to deal with issues within the family instead of with outside organizations.

82% of respondents said they would prefer to contact an organization that works mostly with Muslim women, with only 12% willing to contact an organization with some staff who can speak their language or share their background. None of the survey respondents would contact a mainstream agency.

Focus group participants discussed that they mostly rely on the Mosque, WhatsApp, and Facebook groups to learn about programs and services. They shared that they are a very close community and mostly just help one another, person to person.

SOMALI

There were 22 participants in the Somali focused group. A total of 25 of the survey respondents identified as Somali.

Family Harm

Most participants indicated that it was unlikely that women from their cultural community who were experiencing domestic violence would contact the police. Some indicated they would only contact the police in a life or death situation. The main concern was that it would break up the family.

Muslim Social Services was discussed as a good source of support. When seeking emotional support, the participants highlighted the importance of speaking with a counsellor who understood their religion and culture. However, some noted concerns with confidentiality because it is such a small community.

"If this agency does not understand me, or my culture, I will not go and seek help."

-Somali Focus Group Participant

Some participants were aware of the women's shelter, but not sure if it would be welcoming to Muslim women. There was some confusion that the women's shelter was set up the same way as an emergency shelter and that they would have to sleep on a cot on the floor with a hundred other people.

81% of survey respondents did not know where to go for help if they were being harmed in the family.

Mental Health

76% of survey respondents did not know where to go for mental health support.

Young People

Participants indicated that many youths from their cultural community are struggling with their mental health and there is a lack of support and understanding. They indicated that there is fear of being judged by the community if they ask for help. They said that youth issues are often ignored within the family or the youth refuses help and there is nothing they can do. The only support identified was contacting a family doctor.

86% of survey respondents did not know where to go for help for a young person.

Community Harm and Hate Crimes

Most of the participants agreed that they would contact the police if they experienced a hate crime, but most did not have confidence anything would be done about it. Some said that they would try to see if they could find any other witnesses first before contacting the police so they would be taken seriously. They were more likely to let their peers know about the incident so they could protect themselves.

81% of survey respondents did not know where to go for help if they were being harmed in the community.



“We do lots of volunteering and we do not mention it. It is not part of our culture to mention our volunteering, but in Canada it is part of the culture. ”

-Somali Focus Group Participant

Employment

More than three quarters (76%) of the survey respondents did not know where to go for employment related support. The importance of volunteering was emphasized during the focus group discussion. Participants noted that the volunteer work women from their cultural community do is not often recognized or valued. They indicated that it was not part of their culture to promote yourself, but it is part of Canadian culture to list one’s volunteer work.

They also reported that workplace injuries are a concern due to language barriers. They listed Indeed (an online job search tool), the Working Centre, and the KW Multicultural Centre as good sources for employment-related assistance.

Access to Services

62% of respondents did not believe that there were organizations in the community that could help them if they were in need. They indicated that organizations could do a better job at supporting Muslim women if they:

- offer programs about how to deal with racism, discrimination and harassment in their life
- offer interpretation
- offer a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background
- offer free taxis
- respect their cultural background, values, and religion
- explain more clearly what to expect from their services.

100% of Somali respondents indicated that the main barrier to seeking help was their fear of being treated unfairly due race, with 95% fearing they would be treated unfairly due to their religion. 85% responded that they were afraid of being judged or shamed by their extended family or community members if they sought help, and 80% feared that it may lead to harm to their family such as criminal charges or their children being apprehended.

10% of respondents said they would prefer to contact an organization that works mostly with Muslim women, with only 10% willing to contact an organization with some staff who can speak their language or share their background. 80% of survey respondents would contact a mainstream agency.

TURKISH

A total of 26 survey respondents indicated that they spoke the Turkish language.

Employment

Most respondents listed Immigrant-serving or cultural organizations when identifying sources for employment-related assistance. The respondents indicated that offering a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background and offered free taxis would improve employment-related services. The main barrier was not knowing about available services and fear of being misunderstood due to language.

Young People

Most respondents identified a counsellor, social worker, or psychiatrist as sources for support for young people, followed by Muslim-specific organizations. The main ways services could be improved were:

- offer a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background

- offer free or more affordable services
- offer bus tickets / rides / taxis
- offer programs and services in their language.

Community Harm and Hate Crimes

Most respondents listed the police as a source of support for community harm, followed by mainstream community organizations and Muslim-specific organizations.

Family Harm

Most respondents listed the police as a source of support for family harm, followed by the women's shelter, and mainstream community organizations. The main barrier to accessing services was a fear of being judged or shamed by extended family or community members.

Mental Health

The main source of support for mental health needs were community mental health agencies, Here 24/7, and healthcare providers. Respondents indicated that mental health services could be improved if they respected their cultural background, values, and religion.

Access to Services

75% of survey respondents believed that there were organizations in the community that could help them if they were in need. They indicated that organizations could do a better job at supporting Muslim women if they:

- offer a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background
- respect their cultural background, values, and religion
- offer programs and services in their language
- offer programs about how to deal with racism, discrimination and harassment in their life.

69% of respondents indicated that the main barrier to seeking help was fear of not being treated fairly due to their language. 25% of respondents said they would prefer to contact an organization that works mostly with Muslim women, with 56% willing to contact an organization with some staff who can speak their language or share their background. 19% of the survey respondents would contact a mainstream agency.

URDU/HINDI

A total of 69 survey respondents indicated that they spoke the Urdu/Hindi.

Employment

Most respondents listed Immigrant-serving or cultural organizations when identifying sources for employment-related assistance. The respondents indicated that employment services could be improved by offering programs about how to deal with racism, discrimination and harassment at work or during the interview process, offering free or more affordable services, and explaining more clearly what to expect from their employment services. The main barrier was not knowing about available services.

Young People

Most respondents identified a mainstream agency or a Muslim-specific organization as sources for support for young people. The main ways services could be improved were:

- staff who understood and respected cultural background, values, and religion
- offer free or more affordable services.



Community Harm and Hate Crimes

Although 80% of respondents listed police as a source of support from community harm, only 28% of respondents reported that they had sought help from the police when they or a friend had experienced harm in the community. The main source of support was friends or family (71%), followed by a counsellor or social worker.

The main ways services could be improved were:

- explain more clearly what to expect from their services
- offer a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background
- staff who understood and respected their cultural background, values, and religion
- offer free or more affordable services.

43% of respondents indicated that they would prefer to contact a Muslim-specific organization if they were harmed in the community.

Family Harm

Most respondents listed the police as a source of support for family harm, followed by the women's shelter, and family or friends.

Mental Health

The main source of support for mental health needs were counsellors, social workers, and healthcare providers. Respondents indicated that mental health services could be improved if staff respected and understood their cultural background, values, and religion.

Access to Services

77% of survey respondents believed that there were organizations in the community that could help them if they were in need. They indicated that organizations could do a better job at supporting Muslim women if they:

- offer a support worker who spoke their language or shared their cultural background
- offer interpretation
- staff respected and understood their cultural background, values, and religion
- offer programs and services in their language
- offer childcare at the location.

39% of respondents indicated that the main barrier to seeking help was fear of not being understood due to their language, followed by 36% who felt it was better to deal with the issue within the family.

48% of respondents said they would prefer to contact an organization that works mostly with Muslim women, with 18% willing to contact an organization with some staff who can speak their language or share their background. 26% of the survey respondents would contact a mainstream agency.

SECTION 6: FINDINGS FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS

In addition to the extensive data collection conducted with Muslim women in Waterloo Region, this Community Needs Assessment also sought information, opinions, and ideas from Waterloo Region's service providers. This includes organizations providing social services, community services, and Islamic faith communities.

A survey was prepared with questions that can be categorized as:

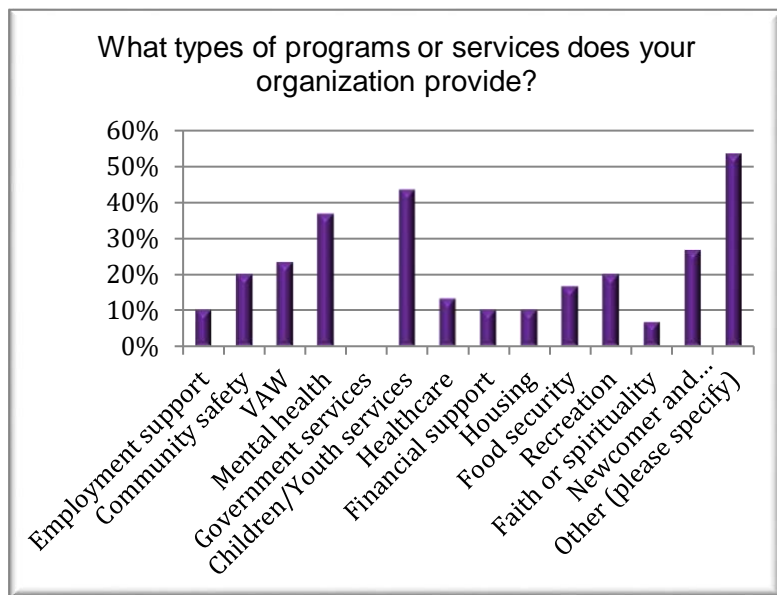
- questions about their organization's programs and services, and how their organization serves Muslim women;
- questions about other community services, and their organization's experiences interacting with, or referring to, these services
- questions about employment and leadership opportunities for Muslim women;
- questions about potential barriers faced by Muslim women.

A total of 34 responses were received from this survey, with respondents from a wide variety of organizations (see chart). The majority of respondents who marked "other" were multi-service agencies indicating a wide variety of programs.

In addition to the survey, several organizations were invited to participate in telephone/video conference interviews, where probing questions could be

asked to dig deeper into these questions. A total of 8 interviews were conducted. Of those interviews, two respondents worked for organizations focused on Domestic and Sexual Violence; one within Newcomer and Settlement services; two ethnocultural organizations; one municipal community service respondent; one early learning organization; and one multi-service social and community support agency.

For this section, 'respondents' refers to those who completed the online survey, while 'interviewees' refers to those who participated in live interviews.



Of the respondents to the survey and interviews, 67% were from management (coordinator to executive director); 21% were non-management; 13% did not answer. 100% of all respondents had at least some knowledge or awareness of the Coalition of Muslim Women.

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF RESPONDENT'S ORGANIZATIONS

Self-Assessment

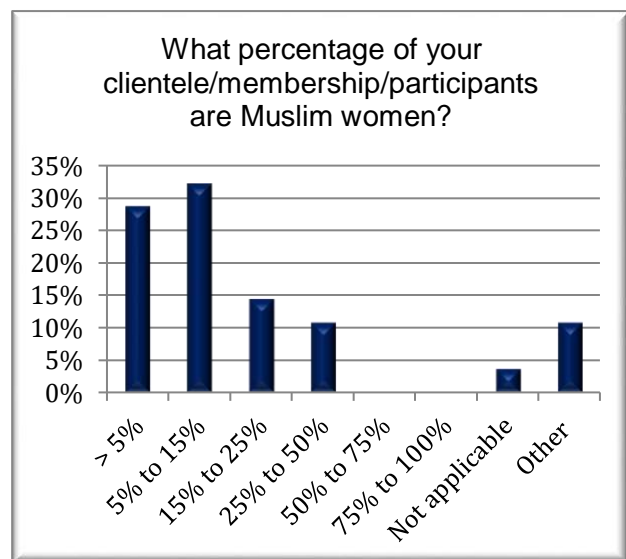
We began by asking respondents to give a self-assessment of how well their organization is doing in promoting their programs and services to Muslim women, with 1 being very poor, and 5 being very well. The average response from the survey was 2.4 out of 5. A second question asked for a self-assessment on how well their organization was doing ensuring access to their programs and services for Muslim women, with the average response of 2.7 out of 5. Interviewees were presented with a slightly different question, asking for a self-assessment for how well their organization was doing with outreach and connecting to Muslim women, with responses averaging 3.5 out of 5. These responses indicate that the average respondent felt their organization had a lot of room for improvement in their programs, services, access, and outreach with Muslim women.

"We aren't doing anything specific to reach out to Muslim women. It's possible we aren't reaching people. We know that Domestic Violence is more prevalent than access to service."

-Interviewee

Proportion of Clientele

Respondents were asked to report the proportion of their clientele/membership/participants are Muslim Women. Between 5-15% and Less than 5% were the two highest scoring responses, at 32% and 29% respectively, with 14% of respondents reporting between 15-25%, and 11% reporting their proportion of Muslim women clients to be between 25-50%. 'Other' respondents indicated complex responses due to the multi-service nature of their organizations. Among interviewees, one estimated 5-15%, another 25-50%, two reported between 80-100%, with several being unsure. One organization did not have this data, but did suggest the most widely spoken



language for their services was Arabic. The majority of respondents indicated that this data was a best guess, rather than based on program data, speaking to a lack of disaggregated or uncollected demographic data for the majority of respondents.

Participation in Programs and Services

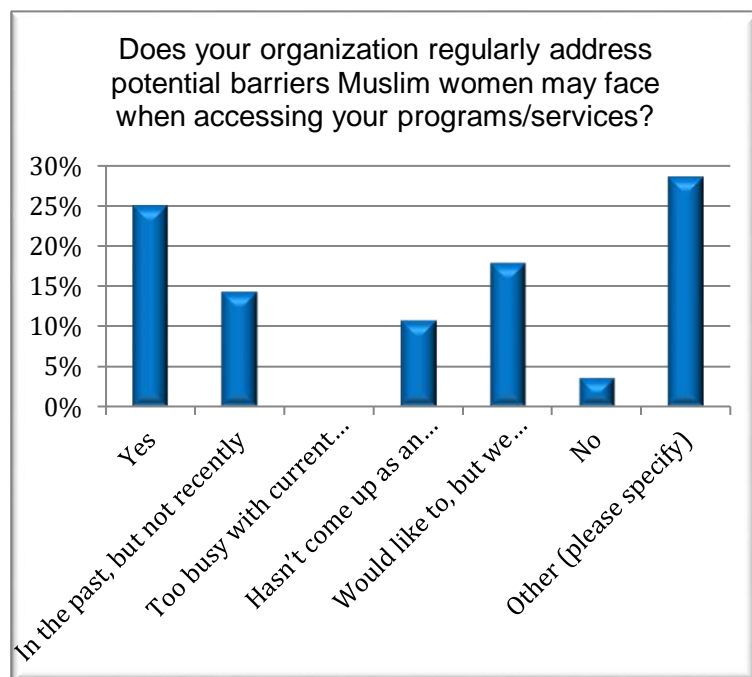
The survey asked organizations if they have programs and services that are regularly accessed by Muslim women. 66% of respondents answered 'Yes', with 'No' and 'Unsure' receiving 17% each. Of the programs these organizations delivered that were regularly accessed by Muslim women, the majority were based around parenting and child development/wellbeing (18 responses), with community/connecting programs, mental health, English language, and settlement programs all receiving 4 responses.

When asked if there were programs and services that they delivered that were underutilized or undersubscribed by Muslim women, 67% responded that they felt there were. Of those responses, the highest number of underutilized programs were programs and services focused on mental health, which supports our findings within the focus group sessions about the reluctance to seek mental health supports among Muslim women and their families.

Efforts to Increase Access and Outreach

Survey and interview respondents were asked whether their organization regularly addresses potential barriers to Muslim women accessing their programs and services. 25% of respondents reported that they do regularly consider and address barriers; 14% said they had in the past, but not recently, while 18% reported that they didn't know where to start, and 11% stated that it hadn't come up as an issue. 29% answered with 'other', with the majority of these stating that they had more work to do, or that specific programs have looked at barriers for Muslim women but not the whole organization.

We asked interviewees to expand on this question and talk about strategies they have found successful for increasing access. One organization reported that they had intentionally worked to build partnerships with ethnocultural and settlement



service organizations, which has increased their referrals. Several found language to be a barrier, which they had mitigated through improved access to interpretation services, and by hiring staff who speak the most common languages of the communities they served. While few of the respondents reported a formal assessment of barriers, one organization described launching an Equity Task Force to look at this very issue. “The Equity Task Force is reviewing our policies, risk assessment, documentation, database, forms, information we have written - we’ve reviewed everything to be more inclusive around different genders, and making sure we are collecting race-based data to find out who we’re serving and who we are not serving.” Additionally, this organization is arranging staff training on equity issues, with a recent training on how to have sensitive conversations around gender. When asked why their organization hadn’t engaged in this work, one respondent described why they hadn’t considered a formal assessment: “Honestly, people weren’t necessarily thinking about it. We had our ways of doing things, and assumed we were doing well.”

PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND ORGANIZATIONS IN WATERLOO REGION

While we asked respondents a number of questions about their own organization’s successes and challenges in serving Muslim women, we also wanted to get a sense for what respondents know or have heard about the approaches, successes, and challenges of other organizations, programs, and services.

Programs and Services Connecting with Muslim Women

We asked respondents if they are aware of any programs or services in the community that are successfully meeting the needs of Muslim women, and invited specific examples. The vast majority of respondents named ethnoculturally focused programs or organizations (i.e. Coalition of Muslim Women, Muslim Social Services, Muslim Women of Cambridge) and



settlement and immigration programs and organizations (KW Multicultural Centre, YMCA Immigrant and Employment Services, Reception House, YW Newcomer Care, FOCUS for Ethnic Women’s support groups, Sanctuary Health Centre). Only a few respondents named programs and organizations that are not based around religion/ethnicity and settlement (Family Violence

Project, Carizon, KW Counselling, EarlyON, YW Entrepreneurship Program, Women's Crisis Services, Family Outreach Program).

The results of this question, with the overwhelming focus from service providers on racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations, is at odds with the results of the surveys and focus groups with Muslim women, where the majority of respondents stated that they would go to the organization with the best program or service over one that was focused on their religion or ethnicity. This disconnect indicates a lack of clarity among mainstream service providers around the role of racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations, where service providers may see them as a helpful replacement to mainstream services, rather than recognizing that these organizations have their own mandates which may not include creating an alternative to mainstream services.

Programs and Services Not Connecting With Muslim Women

During interviews with service providers, we invited them to share with us programs, services, and organizations that they have heard about that are not connecting well with Muslim women. While most were reluctant to name specific programs, several mentioned supports in the areas of addictions, shelters/housing, and mental health. When asked why this might be, one respondent stated: "They generally don't have the staff that is representative of Muslim women. Some can be explicitly unhelpful."

In the majority of interviews, there was the recognition that mainstream service providers still have work to do to increase their knowledge and create a welcoming and inclusive support. One respondent stated: "I think there is a lot of work that can be done across the board in the social service sector. A lot of work needs to be done on cultural training and empathy." One respondent felt that overall, the social service sector in Waterloo Region was doing well in serving Muslim women: "We are doing really great in the community. There is still a lot to be learned, but there is a lot here."



Referrals to Programs and Agencies

In an attempt to learn where service providers are referring Muslim women in the community, we asked survey respondents this question: "If your organization was supporting a Muslim woman who needed additional support, where would you typically refer them?" Respondents

were asked to list the service providers they would refer to within a set of categories. It should be noted that a scenario was not provided, so we should assume that responses were generalized.

The following are the top responses, by category, with the number of references in brackets:

- Employment: YMCA Immigrant and Employment Services (7); Lutherwood (5); Coalition of Muslim Women (4); KW Multicultural Centre (2); The Working Centre (2); Muslim Social Services (2)
- Youth: Carizon (4); Lutherwood (2); Resilience Project, Muslim Social Services, YMCA, Coalition of Muslim Women, YW (1 each)
- Mental Health: Muslim Social Services (7); Carizon (6); KW Counselling (4); Family Counselling Centre Cambridge and North Dumfries (2); doctor or hospital (2); Coalition of Muslim Women (2)
- Financial Decision-Making: Carizon (3); Financial Consumer Agency of Canada (1); Coalition of Muslim Women (1)
- Harm in the community: Coalition of Muslim Women (3); Victim Services (3); Sexual Assault Support Centre (2); Muslim Social Services (2); Waterloo Region Police Services (2)
- Family Violence: Women's Crisis Services (4); Muslim Social Services (3); Carizon (2); Coalition of Muslim Women (2); six others with 1 response.

While these findings show strong knowledge of the breadth of organizations and resources in Waterloo Region, they also indicate a reliance on Muslim-focused organizations, regardless of the situation. This tendency was also present in interviews. When asked what organizations/programs were successfully meeting the needs of Muslim women, the responses were largely focused on the Coalition of Muslim Women, Muslim Social Services, and other ethnoculturally-focuses programs and organizations.

While these responses show strong recognition and respect for the work of these organizations, it also raises concerns about where Muslim women are being referred. For example, though the Coalition of Muslim Women was the third most popular response in the Employment category, they do not have an active program in this area. The emphasis on referrals and

"There's a lot of dependency on grassroots organizations to do the work that mainstream organizations are getting funding to do. They have that connection [grassroots] but the mainstream doesn't have that same connection."

-Interviewee

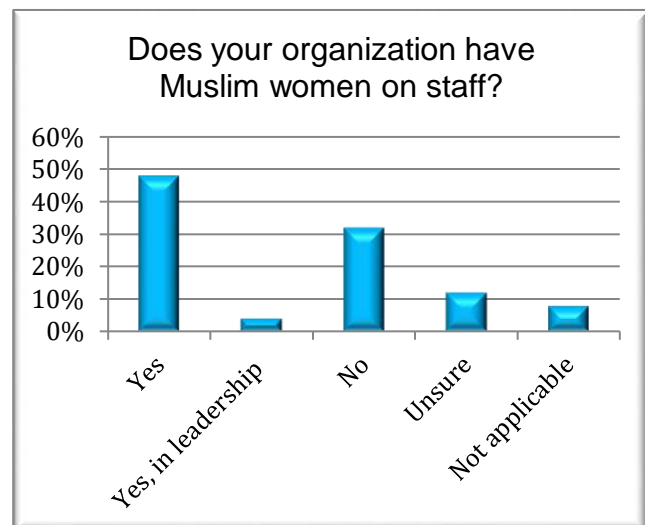
partnership with Muslim-focused organizations, such as the Coalition of Muslim Women or Muslim Social Services, presents additional concerns for the reliance on, and sustainability of, these and other ethnoculturally-focused organizations. While these findings invite further research, they do point to confirmation of what we often hear anecdotally from these organizations: that while they are under resourced, mainstream organizations have high expectations and a strong reliance on their cultural expertise.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Representative Employment

Whether it is through the surveys, focus groups, or service provider interviews, the importance of representation cannot be overstated in this report. We heard consistently from Muslim women that having staff reflective of their religion, culture, ethnicity, and gender, is an important step for organizations who want to better serve Muslim women.

When service providers described programs that were consistently connecting well with Muslim women, having representative frontline staff was a key factor in their engagement. With 48% of survey respondents reporting having Muslim women on staff, it is clear that many organizations see the importance of representative staff, their connections to their community, and the way they can create spaces that are more welcoming and inclusive to their organization's diverse clientele. One service provider said: "In order to service the different ethnic groups and languages, we need to have diverse staff. Make sure it reflects the diversity of our community."



Twelve percent of respondents were unsure if they had Muslim women on their staff team, and 8% marked the question as Not Applicable (typically organizations who don't have staff).


When asked why their organizations didn't have Muslim women on staff, several respondents explained that they have very small staff teams (sometimes of one) and that they hire very rarely. Several other organizations reported that they simply hadn't received any, or only received a few, applications from Muslim women. One interviewee reported: "We've been trying to diversify our staff, and we've struggled. We've hired 6-7 staff members during the pandemic, we put in our postings that it's something that we're looking for, but we haven't received as many

applicants in general, and especially diverse applicants. With Covid-19 there aren't as many people in our field switching jobs."

One survey respondent felt that their organization needed to increase partnerships with Muslim organizations and grow their connection to the Muslim community. Expanding on this, another interviewee felt that Muslim women are active in trying to get to know organizations through volunteering and networking, but that organizations were not making the same effort: "It's Muslim women taking the step to do it, they have the heart for the cause, they are reaching out and connecting. That's how they get known and build rapport. But it's not vice versa. The organization is saying 'hey, we want to be inclusive.' But that requires work."

The Management Gap

While 48% of service providers reported having Muslim women on staff, only 1 out of the 25 organizations that answered this question reported a Muslim woman in a position of staff leadership (management, executive). This was reflected in service provider interviews, where a majority reported Muslim women on staff, but a small minority reported Muslim women in positions of leadership with their organizations.



"They see themselves in us, and see someone who can communicate with them in their language. We're very inclusive and our staff reflect that inclusion. "

-Interviewee

One interviewee described how their organization had a lot of success in connecting to diverse communities by ensuring their frontline staff were reflective of and connected to their communities. This interviewee described how these employees were rarely ever promoted, and received the lowest compensation and job security: "They are our most precariously employed. I would say that is part of our systemic racism. I think we also work within a unionized environment, and collective agreements speak to seniority, so if you can't get in you can't move up. The gap between frontline/part-time and permanent is about \$10 an hour, so a huge jump, but it's difficult for frontline workers to move up within this system."

One interviewee explained that while their organization does have management positions, the culture is very flat, and everyone is invited to contribute to decision-making. In this way, Muslim staff members have been able to provide leadership, and influence changes in their workplace to make it more inclusive of their needs. "Even though there is a manager, we are all at the same level. We discuss things as a whole, we are encouraged to make suggestions, and often our decisions are a group effort. Then we take it to the Executive Director and depending on the funding, etc., we do it. For example, when working around staff insurance and RRSPs, some

"I think the reality in our field, is that positions are being kept by white women of a certain age, and it's very hard to break into that. There's still the 'we know best' [attitude], someone who is known in the community and lived here for thirty years, that's who positions are going to. A lot of positions are already spoken for, even if they are advertised."

-Interviewee

Muslim staff found pieces that were against their religion. We talked to our insurance and though they required full participation, we worked with them to seek exemptions."

This significant employment leadership gap has implications not only for an individual's career advancement, income, and opportunity to develop new skills, it also perpetuates the dominant white and male (the Ontario Nonprofit Network recently reported that while 20% of nonprofit employees are male, males hold 35% of positions of

leadership) views and approaches. While it may benefit the organization to hire a Muslim woman to provide a welcoming frontline face when serving our diverse community, this leadership gap means that the very programs, services, methods of delivery, and allocation of resources are less likely to be influenced by or decided by the community that is being served. Many participants and interviewees shared that they felt that no matter the degrees or experience they brought to their work, they were primarily seen as the cultural bridge, or the smiling, welcoming face for "their" community members, regardless of their skills, interests, and career aspirations.

Several interviewees felt that the stringent requirements their organizations put on positions of leadership may be a barrier for Muslim women, where those hiring may put more weight on local experience and education, or may not put enough weight on language, cultural knowledge, and non-linear career paths. "At this point we have very little racial, cultural, religious diversity. Something that myself and other management have named and identified. In my opinion, we have very stringent requirements for leaders in education and experience, and in that case you're only going to reach a select group of people with these qualifications and experiences. If we want to make progress, that's something that needs to be considered - what are other types of qualifications are valuable, that would contribute to a good leader or a good staff?"

"Forget about their degrees from back home, just enroll in a program in Canada and get a degree or diploma from here, otherwise you'll never make it."

-Interviewee

Another interviewee agreed with this strategy, and described how they had adjusted their hiring metrics to place added value on language: "One of the strategies I've used of late, is looking at the assets that are needed for the position, looking at the neighbourhoods we serve. One of the assets is language. I've elevated that requirement within the job posting."

Board Leadership

Similar to the staff leadership gap, many organizations engage Muslim women as volunteers, however, few reported Muslim women on their boards of directors or governing committees. Only one service provider survey respondent out of 24 reported having a Muslim woman on their board. 54% reported not having Muslim women on their board, while 29% were unsure. Of the service providers interviewed, two reported Muslim women on their boards, however both organizations serve predominately Muslim communities.

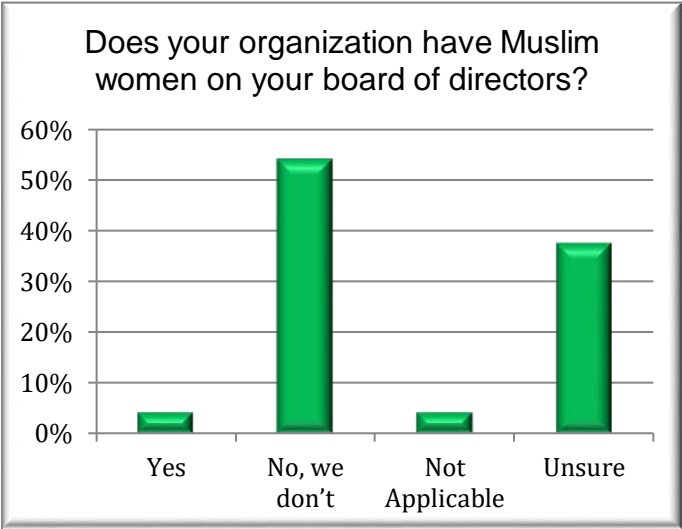
Q. Why do you think your organization doesn't have Muslim women in positions of leadership?

A. Because we need to do a lot of work on anti-racism, and anti-oppressive approaches. Because it's easier to hire and find people who are just like yourself. It's just a reality."

-Interviewee

As the board of directors of an organization has a huge influence on the governance, direction, and services provided by an organization, the many homogeneous boards we see in our community lack the lived experience, cultural and religious knowledge, and connection to diverse communities. One organization described the success (though they added the caveat that they have much further to go) they have had by intentionally recruiting BIPOC women: "We haven't specifically recruited Muslim women, but we do intentionally recruit BIPOC women (and trans and non-binary folks), but we could do better. 27% of our Board members are racialized."

When discussing why the diversity of our community is not reflected on their boards, several interviewees pointed to the often informal nature of how board members are recruited, with existing board members reaching out to their own networks to fill roles. It was



additionally reported that boards often place more value on professional job titles and individuals networked with wealthy community members. "Our board seems to be a homogenous group of people, from a similar way of life. I'm not sure how positions are filled, but I would imagine we are not reaching out in ways that would get diverse folks."

For a lot of newcomers, it's [a board role] just a privilege we don't have, we can't just go do something and not get paid for it."

-Interviewee

Several respondents explained that recruiting a Muslim woman onto the board is only the first step, and that organizations need to take critical looks at their board and organizational cultures to create welcoming and inclusive spaces where their opinions and ideas are welcomed and valued. One respondent stated: "I think we have a lot of work to do to make a board meeting feel like a safe space for racialized people, or people from different religions. We need to do that work first. Trust. That layer of trust is something that we don't talk about much. There needs to be that trust with the team,

board, the organization, for people to want to take that risk." Another interviewee described witnessing the result of not building that inclusive and trusting culture: "We had tried years ago, there was an opportunity to bring Muslim women to the boards of Neighborhood Associations. The existing boards didn't create a welcoming environment. So people left."

BARRIERS FOR MUSLIM WOMEN

In addition to asking service providers about if and how they address barriers to access, we asked them what they see as the major barriers to accessing services and resources for Muslim women in Waterloo Region. With 72%, language was the most selected barrier (and is expanded on in the next section).

Childcare

66% of respondents named childcare as a barrier for many Muslim women, and this was also reflected in the focus groups with Muslim women, many of whom talked about juggling childcare with participation in the community. In an interview, one service provider talked about a successful community language program they ran for mothers. It was successful because while

"As much as the country has welcomed immigrants, there are still people who don't like foreigners, not even specifically Muslim women. Being female is already a barrier, as well as for example wearing a hijab, it's another barrier. And you get lumped in with the terrorists. As much as people say it isn't a barrier, it is."

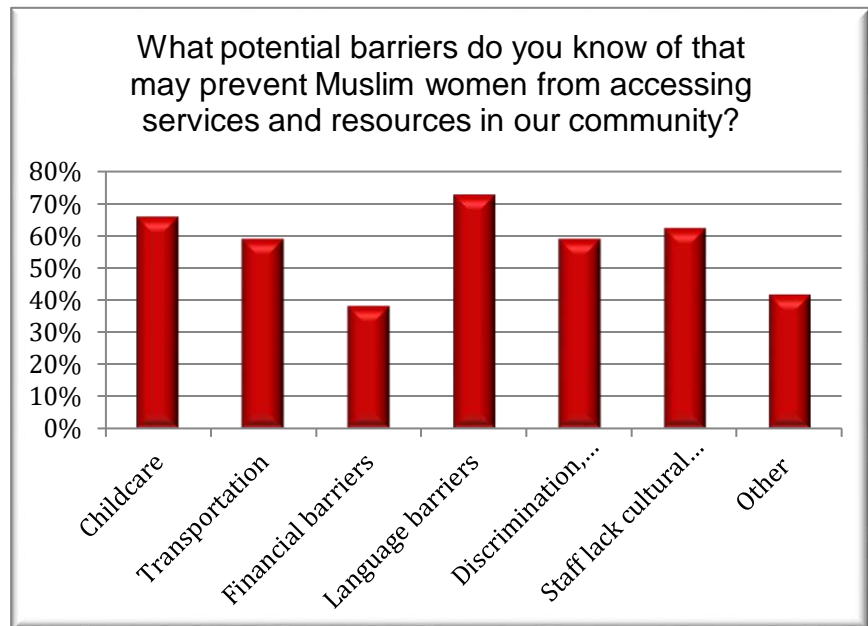
-Interviewee

the mothers were practicing English and making social connections, the children were in the next room getting homework support.

Discrimination and Islamophobia

Lack of cultural understanding of staff was selected by 62% of respondents, and is expanded on above. Discrimination and Islamophobia was named by 59% of respondents, which is also reflected in what we heard in focus groups, and in the service provider interviews. Many Muslim women who were interviewed talked about the many layers of discrimination they may face - being Muslim, being a woman, being an immigrant, wearing a hijab, being Black - and the ways those layers feed into preconceived assumptions about them. One respondent said: "The biggest challenge is the visible challenge...Layers of clothing, hijab, and automatically

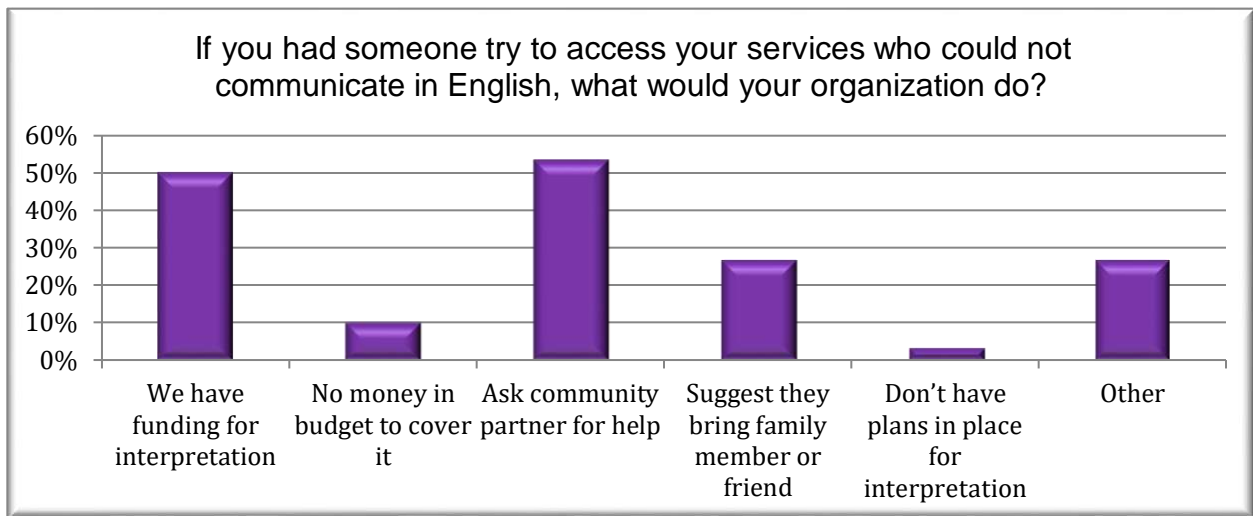
assumptions are made about you that you don't speak English, you're not as educated as them, you don't belong. Once you break that barrier, then you still have the barriers of being a woman. The phobias and preconceived notions of oppression, etc. As a Black, Muslim, woman, immigrant, now there are four things against me that feed into what people think I can't do."



Language Barriers

While the Muslim population in Waterloo Region is diverse, with a mix of newcomers, established immigrants, and Canadian-born individuals, language was a frequently cited potential barrier, particularly for more recent immigrants. We asked respondents what their standard procedure is when they encounter a client who requires interpretation services to access supports. Of survey respondents, 53% stated that they would turn to a community partner for assistance; 50% had funding and arrangements in place for interpretation services; 27% stated they would suggest the client brings a family member to interpret, while 10% answered they simply don't have funding or arrangements in place for interpretation. Of those who marked 'other', there were mixed responses that expanded on the preselected answers. We heard: "whatever makes them more comfortable"; "we use Google Translate"; and "we have

Arabic speaking staff.” Several organizations described having, or looking at obtaining, a subscription to a telephone-based live interpretation service.



Many of the strategies that do not include formal interpretation services may provide an adequate level of communication for basic supports and services (though when describing their multilayered approach, one interviewee did admit: “There are gaps.”). For services that require higher levels of privacy and discretion, such as healthcare, supports around domestic violence, navigating the legal system, and access to mental health supports, using a community partner, family member, or inaccurate translation applications such as Google Translate, creates a significant barrier to access to vital supports and services.

Another concern around interpretation that we heard through Focus Groups with Muslim women was the worry that with small linguistic groups in Waterloo Region, any local interpreter would be known to the individual. The Manager of Interpretation and Translation with the KW Multicultural Centre agreed that this can be a concern, but one that is more perception than reality: “this is something that is a concern when it’s a small community. If the client isn’t comfortable with the interpreter locally, we have over the phone access from outside the community. We also try to educate the community that our interpreters have gone through extensive training through the Ministry, and sign a confidentiality agreement. If confidentiality is broken, that’s an automatic dismissal because of the harm to trust of the organization.” Unfortunately, this level of interpretation is not funded across the board. “For the last 25 years we have been advocating especially with healthcare, and especially with women. We receive funding for interpretation for domestic violence, and we are on our third year of funding for medical interpretation”.

Other Barriers

Several survey respondents named 'Other' potential barriers. Barriers that were suggested include: the need for more gender-specific programming for adults (echoing a service provider's suggestion for more sports and recreation programs for women and girls); fear of losing children (a fear that is echoed throughout all of the surveys and discussions in this needs assessment); stigma of seeking support (another fear that is echoed in surveys and discussions, particularly around the more sensitive areas of mental health and domestic violence); substance use among other guests in shelters; and lack of knowledge of funding organizations.

"They like Muslim women as a volunteer, but for a paid role, we are automatically dismissed most of the time."

-Focus Group Participant

PROGRAM AND SERVICE GAPS

While many of the findings in this report highlight broad themes, we also asked service providers about what program and service gaps exist in our community for Muslim women, inviting specific feedback on our service categories (employment, youth, mental health, community violence, family violence, and financial decision-making). Though not a specific program and service gap, each category received responses about the importance of having representative and culturally knowledgeable staff. Several categories (employment, youth, and financial decision-making) received responses about a lack of these services in Cambridge. Within the employment category, there were responses about the discrimination people feel when their experience or education is not recognized in Canada, a decades-long complaint of newcomers to Canada. In one focus group, a participant simply said: "Forget about their degrees from back home, just enroll in a program in Canada and get a degree or diploma from here, otherwise you'll never make it." Other participants in the focus group agreed.

Within the youth category, there were suggestions from participants and interviewees for more programming specific to Muslim youth, and a comment on the need for mosques to be supportive of youth programming. This sentiment was shared in focus group discussions, where some participants suggested that if mental health supports, particularly



those for youth, were available in the mosque, or clearly endorsed by the mosque, they would be more likely to seek support.

Family Violence and Violence Against Women

The category receiving the most attention to program and service gaps was for family violence and Violence Against Women. Within the focus groups, we heard overwhelmingly that most women would not seek support for domestic violence unless it was absolutely necessary, due to stigma and a fear of losing control of the situation (and particularly, losing their children). Within these focus groups, we heard from many women who assumed that the only option for support was to go to a women's shelter, while a few did know that the majority of support from Women's Crisis Services comes through outreach, rather than shelter stays. There is a clear gap in accessible knowledge about supports for women experiencing violence coming from a cultural and religious informed perspective. One interviewee who works in this field stated: "In general, we could use more information about how to reach Muslim women, what are the resources and supports they feel they would benefit from. Within our scope, we could use more information and what would be helpful to provide."

"There's a gap in social support for Muslim women, especially for women who had to leave their relationship, have experienced domestic violence, etc. They are often then outside their community and need a way to connect with other Muslim women who have had a similar experience. There are so many needs going through a separation, and without that network you don't have that support."

-Interviewee

Closely related, knowledge of Canadian laws related to Violence Against Women, separation and custody, and child welfare, were named as a service gap. It was clear from the focus groups that the participants wanted a resource for this information where they could feel safe from losing control of the situation - a place where they can learn about services and supports, and laws and rights, with staff who deeply understand their cultural and religious communities.

Within the focus groups we also heard that women feared losing their community if they came forward and sought support for domestic violence. One service provider interviewee suggested that a program gap exists for social and emotional support for Muslim women particularly during and after separation. Women will often experience intense isolation and separate not only from their spouse, but from their community. The interviewee stated that FOCUS for Ethnic Women is working to fill this gap with social programs, but noted more needed to be done.

SECTION 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

While reading the full report is required to take in the diverse voices and opinions, for ease of the intended audience – service providers, community groups and organizations, and institutions such as local municipalities and the police service – the authors have reflected on what we heard from participants, and made general recommendations. It is our hope that these recommendations begin, or contribute to vital conversations in the community. These recommendations are based on the input we received, and are our interpretation of actions that our community can take to better serve Muslim women, and we hope, create a more welcoming, just, and equitable community.

GENERAL

The importance and essential value of grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations was consistently reported by survey respondents, focus group participants, and service providers. Through these discussions we also heard about a lack of support and resources for, and knowledge for these organizations.

- *Research should be conducted into the frequency and breadth of support requests made to grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations by mainstream service providers.*
- *Local funders should consider additional resources to support grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations to respond to these requests, and mainstream service providers who rely on the expertise of these organizations should provide financial compensation to these organizations for their services.*
- *Mainstream agencies should assess their knowledge- and service-gaps that may lead to an overreliance on ethnoculturally-focused organizations. Service providers should consider the value of their relationships with grassroots organizations and work with them to ensure their financial sustainability through service partnerships.*
- *From a systems-level, mainstream service providers should work with religious- and culturally-focused organizations to build a service map to clarify the roles and interactions of these organizations with mainstream service providers.*

ACCESS TO SERVICE

In surveys and focus groups we found many respondents who did not know where to go to access services. We also heard from many communities who have active WhatsApp and Facebook groups they use to share information.

- *Service providers should look at WhatsApp and Facebook as potential avenues to distribute information and build relationships.*

In multiple focus groups we heard that participants would be more likely to access supports if they were endorsed or encouraged by the mosque, or if they were available at the mosque.

- *Service providers could locate, engage, or partner with faith communities such as mosques or ethnocultural community organizations to offer programs that are 'endorsed' by the communities the program aims to serve.*

The importance of peer support workers (often informal leaders within their religious or cultural communities) in increasing access to services was articulated in all surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

- *The use of peer support workers to engage isolated communities should be continued and expanded by the CMW (or in partnership with other organizations); service providers could partner with the CMW and their peer support workers to increase awareness of and access to their supports.*

We consistently heard from respondents and participants that language was a significant barrier to accessing services.

- *To increase access, service providers should clearly articulate their interpretation policy on their websites and program materials.*
- *While some services had funding for interpretation services, many do not. A backbone organization – such as The Region of Waterloo – should explore increased funding for local interpretation, or an umbrella subscription to telephone interpretation services that could be shared with service providers throughout the community.*

A number of respondents to the survey identified a lack of support services in Cambridge as being a barrier to access.

- *Funders and planning tables should continue to examine the geographic distribution of services, and support Cambridge-based organizations to expand supports.*



COMMUNITY HARM

In focus groups, a range of participants supported the idea of a reporting service for hate incidents to support them not only with reporting, but with ongoing emotional support.

- *Establish a live reporting number for hate incidents supporting people to report, and provide immediate connection to counselling.*

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Through the survey, and particularly in focus groups, it was clear that many communities would not report domestic violence for a variety of reasons, including fear of losing control of the situation (not knowing how the process might unfold), concerns about police involvement, concerns about losing their children, impact on immigration status, community stigma, and fearing that a women's shelter would be an unsafe environment and one where they could not bring their children. Some actions that may reduce reluctance to seek support include:

- *In multiple languages, produce documents outlining the steps and possible outcomes from seeking support.*
- *Establish or partner with a peer worker program to engage diverse communities and increase pathways to support.*
- *List on organization website if you offer Halal food, a prayer room, interpretation, etc.*
- *Post photos of what the shelter and its rooms look like; when the Covid-19 pandemic ends, hold open houses for faith, organization, and community leaders to build their knowledge of support.*

Another concern shared in focus groups and service provider interviews about seeking support for domestic violence was losing one's community. For many of the language- and cultural-communities we engaged with, separating from or divorcing a spouse could be a very isolating experience.

- *Service providers should work with grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations to increase social and emotional support groups for separated or divorced Muslim women.*

In focus groups, many participants supported the concept of a shelter for Muslim women and their children (with Nisa Homes in Mississauga and London as examples), while some participants worried that a shelter for Muslim women would make Islam appear to be a violent religion.

- *The development of a shelter for Muslim women warrants further study.*

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Through the survey, and particularly in focus groups we heard several incidents of participants experiencing discrimination and gendered Islamophobia in the job search process and as workers.

- *Employment service agencies should provide specific resources and programs for clients experiencing workplace discrimination*

EQUITABLE EMPLOYMENT

Two key themes coming from this Community Needs Assessment are: representative staff and volunteers are key drivers of access to services, and; there is a problem of access to equitable employment, particularly beyond front-line positions and into positions of leadership, among Muslim women.

- *Service providers that want to engage Muslim women in their services need to hire people who are representative of the community.*
- *Muslim women need to be hired for and promoted beyond front-line roles. Organizations need to implement equitable hiring policies and invest in their staff members to position them for advancement.*
- *Organizations should consider establishing, and allocate resources towards, leadership development opportunities for diverse frontline staff members.*

FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

Through the survey and focus groups, this was an area that we didn't hear many concerns over. The one area that this did come up was in reporting or escaping domestic violence, and the woman not having access to her own funds. One concept that was mentioned in a focus group was the concept of having a trustee where a woman could hold her own funds.

- *Establish a community trustee where women can hold their money separately and confidentially.*

LEADERSHIP

This community needs assessment confirmed what we know anecdotally: that the composition of boards of directors does not reflect the diversity of our community and people with lived experience. We also heard from many women, particularly newcomers, that volunteering when they had ongoing childcare duties and/or strapped finances, was not possible. As the body that

directs the resources and attention of organizations, we need boards that are diverse and inclusive.

- *Establish a service in the community that links organizations to BIPOC board members; in addition to the links, provide guidance and support to organizations on anti-racism, decolonization, equity, and inclusion.*
- *Funders should consider a fund to support people from marginalized groups or with lived experience with resources for childcare, transportation, or a general honorarium, to participate on local boards.*
- *An ongoing leadership program should be established to provide people from marginalized groups or with lived experience with the knowledge, encouragement, and connections to participate on local boards.*
- *Service providers who have not done so should undergo a formal process to build inclusion throughout the organization, starting with their boards.*

MENTAL HEALTH

Along with domestic violence, we heard that mental health issues are significantly stigmatized or not understood in many communities. When discussing youth mental health, many were reluctant to support their children accessing mental health support due to these issues.

- *A community organization should create a multimedia campaign featuring members of a variety of ethnic/linguistic/religious communities explaining their mental health experience and resources that are available.*



- *Mental health service providers should build stronger partnerships with faith leaders and cultural communities to increase uptake of supports.*
- *Local mental health organizations (such as the Counselling Collective) should develop partnerships with professionals and organizations in other communities to increase access to counsellors with shared language, religion, or culture.*
- *Local mental health organizations (such as the Counselling Collective) should distribute information about available supports, written in a variety of languages, through local high schools.*

POLICING

Although this Community Needs Assessment didn't specifically ask about interactions with police, the Waterloo Regional Police Service was identified in surveys and focus groups as a major potential barrier to accessing services. Particularly in focus groups, mistrust and fear of police was expressed frequently and explicitly. The response to a variety of situations – such as reporting domestic violence or reporting a hate crime – was consistently viewed through this lens. The relationship an individual has with police should never be a barrier to accessing services or reporting a crime, and this Needs Assessment made clear that this is not the case for many in our community.

- *Police should establish a peer navigator program in partnership with grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations where peers can be engaged to build a trusting bridge to interact with the police. This should be a paid role.*
- *Police should establish a direct reporting line for incidences where the police are dismissive, racist, or exhibit prejudice. There should be a clear reporting structure along with a clear resolution plan. A third party should be involved to ensure a satisfactory resolution takes place.*
- *Police should expand efforts to send police to community events to sit and engage with people.*
- *The Waterloo Regional Police Service should fund an arms-length engagement process with ethnic, religious, and language communities to hear concerns and ideas for systemic reforms; this should not be a public relations campaign, but a neutral assessment of systemic reform options for the Service to undertake.*

YOUTH

Although we didn't hear significant feedback about youth programs, we do need to acknowledge that this Community Needs Assessment did not target youth for our audience. Based on the stigma surrounding mental health expressed throughout this Needs Assessment,

we believe that access to mental health supports for youth, particularly youth from marginalized communities, needs further and urgent study.

- *Local mental health organizations (such as the Counselling Collective) should distribute information about available supports, written in a variety of languages, through local high schools.*
- *Service providers should work with grassroots racialized, religio-cultural, and/or ethno-cultural focused organizations to offer co-ed or targeted programs that are more comfortable for female youth and their caregivers.*



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Women and Gender
Equality Canada

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