

Why does the Muslim community have an aversion to the media? Is all media bad? Is Islamophobia a problem? How can trust be built between the Muslim Community and journalists? These questions were put forward to members of the Muslim community and a group of journalists, and their answers have been compiled in this report in an attempt to tackle the issue collectively.

MEND Journalists' Roundtable Discussion with the Muslim Community

Many thanks to our partners
ITV Wales and NUJ Wales-
Training

Sahar Al-Faifi

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Introduction

Muslim communities, as well as other minorities, have been demonised by some of the print media. Statistics show that for every positive reference to Muslims in the print media, there are 21 negative references. This negative portrayal of Muslims has led to an alarming increase in discrimination and Islamophobic hate crimes, mainly targeted at women who present as visibly Muslim.

Muslim Engagement & Development (MEND) in collaboration with ITV Wales and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ)- Wales Training, organised a journalists' Christmas lunch with the Muslim community to discuss what local journalists and local communities could do collectively to tackle divisive rhetoric in the media and, in turn, the hateful derivatives of this.

The event was an opportunity to have mutual discussions and conversations as well as networking with the local communities' leaders to promote ethical journalism and commend positive coverage.

The event took place at the Culture and Media Centre (CMC) in Cardiff on Friday 14th December 2018 from 12 pm to 4.30 pm.

It commenced with a presentation about Islamophobia, its definition and impact, delivered by MEND regional manager in South Wales - Sahar Al-Faifi. After this presentation, Richard Speight from the National Union of Journalists (NUJ)- Wales Training, gave a speech on the importance of learning, and journalism to foster community cohesion. Following this, ITV Wales apprentices Zahra Errami, Mollie Latham and Eugenia Taylor gave an insightful presentation about their experiences as apprentices and the work ITV Wales did to improve its diversity.

One of the aims of this event is to commend good journalism and to highlight the challenges. Ruth Mosalski, a journalist from Wales Online spoke about her work covering the struggles faced by veiled Muslim women in the aftermath of Boris Johnson's comments, likening veiled women to 'letterbox' and 'bank robber' and how many found these comments racist and Islamophobic. Ruth has also challenged UKIP Wales leader Gareth Bennett on his [views](#), strongly and professionally. This has been highly commended by her peers and the community, although sadly, Ruth was subject to misogynistic diatribe in the social media, as you can see in the below tweet.





Carp hey denim  @Carpheydenim · Aug 14

Replying to @WalesOnline

What a rubbish interview, pathetic hack journalist. Nothing but a hatchet job by an disingenuous idiot who obviously wasn't allowing him to answer before trying to talk over the top. She deserved to be patronized.



It seems that there is a common pattern, whereby Muslim women are being ridiculed and people who defend them or attempt to give them voice are hounded and abused.

The final speech was given by Dr Abdul-Azim Ahmed from Muslim Council of Wales (MCW), who spoke about the importance of not only ethical journalism but also authentic journalism mentioning the example of the work by BBC Radio Wales in covering the Ramadan experience, its meaning and importance, to the public. BBC Radio Wales could have invited community members to speak about Ramadan at their studios, but rather, commendably, opted to have their radio presenters spend days in one of the local mosques covering authentically the details of the rituals of worship practiced by Muslims in Cardiff, gathering different and interesting personal perspectives.

The main part of this event was the discussion between the community leaders and the journalists, who were asked to answer the following questions in order to compile a working recommendation for all. The questions were:

- What do journalists want from the community?
- What does the community want from journalists?
- How can trust be built between the community and journalists?
- How can the media be a true reflection of diverse communities?

Discussion & Recommendations:

What do journalists want from the community?

The journalists want people with human, interesting stories and to become aware of facts and current case studies that are not exclusively about faith. Journalists are interested in being introduced to new contacts and building network. They would like to see more people to feel confident in coming forward and participating in different shows, programmes and articles. Furthermore, journalists would like the community to appreciate that not all media is bad and not all print media is the Sun or the daily mail.

“Not all media is bad and not all print media is the Sun or the Daily Mail”

There is a difference between broadcast media (BBC and ITV), print media (the Sun, Daily Mail, Metro etc.), local print media (Echo and Western Mail), online national media (Mail Online) and online local media (Wales Online). The broadcast media is relatively well regulated by a separate regulatory body called Ofcom and the print media is poorly regulated for several reasons by a separate regulatory body

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called Independent Press Standard Organisation (IPSO). MEND can facilitate a better understanding of the different media outlets and their positions on the political spectrum, through the delivery of its media masterclass to the community. Local journalists want the community to know that they are not the Sun or the Daily Mail and they are genuinely looking to cover new stories accurately and authentically.

In addition, journalists are keen to know more about different faiths and cultures, thus media bodies need to invest in the education and training of journalists and improve their religious literacy for reporting. For example it is quite often media outlets name the Muslim women's face veil 'Burka' whilst those women never name it a 'Burka' but Niqab, as 'Burka' is the blue veil that covers everything including eyes and hands and worn by some women in Afghanistan. The 'Burka' is not prevalent in the UK and mostly has many negative connotations, which make it more difficult for women who chose to wear it to be accepted.

What does the community need from journalists?

An understanding by journalists and reporters that minority communities such as Muslims are not fairly or accurately represented in the national print media and the responsibility is on them to balance that out. The fact that for every positive reference to Muslims in the national print media, there are 21 negative references to Muslims, is a case in point. The community would like to see more normalisation of their presence and for their contributions to be highlighted and celebrated by the public and the media. For example; there have been 2.5 million Muslims who helped the allies in [WWI](#) but hardly people know.

“The community wants more positive coverage and more authentic and accurate reporting”

With the rise of populist politics, many politicians across the spectrum are utilising fake stories and information, enforcing certain prejudices to gain votes. It is therefore vital for journalists and reporters to fact check and make this checking an integral part of their work. At this event, MEND distributed a booklet as a Christmas present that can help the reporters to check their facts before reporting and ease their work. The booklet is titled British Muslims Facts & figures: a compilation of the history, characteristics, challenges and achievements of British Muslims.

Presented at the event, the booklet “British Muslims Facts & Figures: A Compilation of the History, Characteristics, Challenges and Achievements of British Muslims” as a useful resource, including infographics, to enable fact checking.

The community would like to know both sides of a story, even if a media outlet has a particular political orientation, as impartiality is imperative and this would enable the community to form their own conclusions.

The logo for MEND, consisting of the word "mend" in a bold, lowercase, green sans-serif font.

The community would like media outlets to be held accountable for inaccuracies or unfair bias. If a media outlet publishes an inaccurate or false story, the outlet ought to apologise swiftly, with due prominence. For example, when certain print media outlets published a story on its front page in large bold font, that 1 in 5 British Muslims sympathise with Jihadis, these media outlets ought to have apologised and acknowledged the breach on the same page and in the same font, and not published the correction in a small corner of page 2 (without an apology) that hardly anyone would see. Local outlets may consider going beyond IPSO guidelines and form a local complaints procedure that is geared towards engaging with the local community.

The community would like to feel that they are part of the whole and not excluded. This could be achieved by building meaningful relationships with journalists that are based on trust and partnerships through, regular engagement and not only when an atrocity or terrorist attack has taken place.

Members of the community actively support integration, by endorsing participation in English and Welsh language learning efforts; nevertheless, some members of the community would still require assistance to overcome language barriers in order to tell their stories. Making use of or providing translators would lead to a more inclusive representation of the community and bring forward voices that might otherwise be side lined.

How can trust be built between the community and journalists?

The best way to build the trust is to listen to the Muslim community's concerns and problems. The biggest problem facing British Muslims today is Islamophobia and the various ways it can manifest within our society. MEND commissioned a ComRes [survey](#) of British adults on Islamophobia in British society, assessing its impact.

The survey shows that 37% of the public think that the percentage of Muslim population in Britain is 20% and in Wales 46% think that the Muslim population comprises of 20% or more. The truth is that the Muslim population is around 5% and in Wales is 1.5%. This discrepancy indicates that the influence of media outweighs personal experience

in estimating numbers of Muslims. The constant barrage of Islamophobic articles in the Press gives the impression that there are a lot more Muslims than in reality, which then feeds into the negative stereotypes of Muslims such as 'The Muslims are taking over the country'.

MEND ComRes report on Islamophobia and its impact on British society – a potential article source.



This kind of Islamophobic narrative creates fear and hostility towards Muslim and as a result has an impact on community cohesion. The ComRes survey shows that 43% of the public would be concerned if a mosque was built in their neighbourhood and 22% of the public would be concerned if a Muslim family moved in next door.

The full ComRes report can be found [here](#) .

A summary of the ComRes findings can be found [here](#) .

However, it is not all doom and gloom. According to the survey, there appears to be the beginnings of acknowledgement that Islamophobia exists and that it is a problem, which is the first step in order to find a solution. More than one third of British adults (37%) say that the marginalisation of Islam in British public life is increasing in the media and nearly half of British adults (48%) say there is more negative discrimination against Muslims than people of other faiths. When members of the public were asked who is to blame for Islamophobia, 58% said it was the media.

Both the community and the journalists need to take the initiative in establishing and building relationships based on trust. If a story is brought by the community but not current or interesting enough to be told or published, the journalists may wish to consider responding to the community member with advice on how to improve it and specify what is required.

To build trust, the community needs to understand the difference between media outlets. Generally, local journalists (Wales Online, Echo) report stories accurately and authentically, unlike national sensationalist publications that appear to seek out any opportunity to demonise and dehumanise Muslims. MEND can facilitate a better understanding of the different media outlets and their positions at the political spectrum through its media masterclass that has been delivered to the community and comprises of three main sessions with practical workshops.

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Session 1: The Media: its influence & reporting	Session 2: Regulating and challenging the media – Print media	Session 3: Regulating and challenging the media – Broadcast media
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Types of media: print, broadcast and online 2. Who is behind the major print media outlets 3. Workshop 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why challenge media output? 2. Newspapers and its regulatory body (IPSO): functions, problems, Leveson and Royal Charter 3. Workshop 4. Broadcast and online media 5. Case studies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. OFCOM <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) OFCOM broadcasting code b) Complaining to OFCOM c) Case studies 2. Online and social media. 3. Workshop

Furthermore, inviting journalists to community events and perhaps to deliver a session at the MEND community masterclass could enhance trust and would enable journalists to meet people from different walks of life. More events such as this MEND event can foster these relationships and improve mutual understanding.

With only 18% of articles highlighting the human aspects of Muslims, there is a need for journalists to work with the community to report and emphasise on the human aspect of minorities such as Muslims, who have been dehumanised and seen as the other for decades. This can be done by covering cultural events, remarkable positive stories, showcasing their contributions, talents or just good character of members from these targeted communities.

There is a sense of fatigue from the repetitive stereotypes portrayed, that is: repeated expectations for apologies when terrorist attacks occur; reporting that presents 'good' Muslim vs 'bad' Muslim, whereby the first is an establishment appeaser and the latter is a government critic. Another angle is when the extreme ends of the Muslim community are invited to discuss Muslim issues on air, side-lining mainstream Muslims. Freedoms of speech and press are fundamental values for all and must be protected but it comes with responsibility. Ultimately, exchanging the discourse of 'us' and 'them' with the discourses of 'we' is a collective responsibility for all.

How can the media be a true reflection of diverse communities?

Reflecting modern society through media, ensures that the content is relevant and accessible to all. This is not because it is the right thing to do but it will give these media outlets mass appeal, attracting the largest possible audiences which is essential for any media outlet. This



mass appeal can be achieved by representing different audiences within the workforce and on-screen.

At this MEND event some media outlets such as ITV shared their good practices of ensuring diversity within its work-force and on-screen. ITV Wales has a diversity chart in its main office that is clear and visually illustrates how far or close ITV is from its goal of being a true reflection of modern society and this chart is updated on a monthly basis in the office. Also, ITV Wales has a diversity panel that meets regularly and updates on new projects. ITV diversity time-tables are shown below:

On-screen perceived contributions in UK-broadcast ITV programmes

01 January - 31 December 2017

Diversity characteristic	ITV on-screen perceived (%)	UK national population statistics (%)
Female	50.1	51.0
Age 50+	22.1	36.0
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic	11.6	12.9
People with a disability or long term health condition	1.8	18.0
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual	7.6	6.4
Transgender	0.0	0.8

This data was generated on 10 May 2017 and is based on 141,042 contributions. From the 6,381 hours of programming, we have diversity information for 4,564 hours, or 71.5%. Diamond is a single online system used by the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky to obtain consistent diversity data on programmes they commission. More information about Diamond and how perceived data is captured can be found in the Diamond Guidance Notes and the Technical and Reporting FAQs on the [CDN website](#).

Where available (for gender, age, ethnicity and disability), we use the 2011 Census data. For sexual orientation and gender identity, we use other available estimates from the Office for National Statistics.

UK workforce

Based on total headcount as of 31 December 2017

Diversity characteristic	UK workforce (%)					Labour workforce estimates (%)
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	
Female	52.1	51.8	51.7	51.9	53.0	47.0
Age 65+	2.0	1.9	1.7	1.2	1.2	3.6
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic	8.9	9.5	10.9	11.1	11.5	13.0
People with a disability or long term health condition	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.8	2.5	17.0
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual	5.7	5.5	5.7	6.0	6.0	6.4
Transgender	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	0.0	0.8

Figures include permanent and PAYE fixed-term employees only (it does not include freelance, contingent or agency workers) and are based on the number of employees who chose to disclose.

We consider that national workforce statistics will serve as the most appropriate comparison. We have used June 2017 labour market data from the Office of National Statistics. There are no workforce estimates available for sexual orientation or gender identity so we have used other available estimates from the Office of National Statistics.

Targeted recruitment from the Muslim community will build trust and also encourage talented young Muslims to apply for jobs within the media, making it more diverse. One of the suggestions mentioned at this event is to organise tours in collaboration with MEND at



ITV, BBC etc, whereby young Muslims can see the work of media outlets and be inspired by it.

Diversity, faith and cultural training for media staff benefits all. Such training would improve religious literacy, foster better understanding and would create a more friendly environment for unrepresented groups. Fostering an understanding of Muslim needs in terms of quiet spaces that allow them to perform short obligatory prayers during the day, at workplaces, creates an environment where Muslims can feel at ease in their employment and, in turn, more productive.

Moreover, having diverse role models in the media especially on-screen would encourage young people to aspire to seek media positions, as they visualise themselves and think of themselves emulating these role models from their own backgrounds.

Finally, media outlets are recommended to have apprenticeship schemes for unrepresented groups. For example, this year ITV had biracial, Muslim and special needs apprentices.

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Top tips for the journalists and the community

Journalists' top tips:

- Make use of the resource: “British Muslims Facts & figures: a Compilation of the History, Characteristics, Challenges and Achievements of British Muslims”.
- Do highlight the human aspect.
- Do celebrate the different faiths and cultures.
- Do attempt to improve religious literacy by asking questions. The community will not be offended.
- Do fact check before publishing.
- Do think of barriers that might prevent the community from engaging e.g. language.
- Do produce content that is balanced and impartial.
- Do have a cuppa with community members, it works magic.
- Don't only contact the community when something bad happens.

Community's top tips:

- Do have a cuppa with a journalist.
- Do inform a journalist when you have something interesting or current.
- Don't think that all media is the Sun. Not all reporters are bad, the majority of are genuine.
- Don't confuse the journalists with jargon or assume they know your faith.
- Don't be the exclusive gatekeeper for the community. Open the door for new community members to engage.
- Do explain your faith in simple terms using accessible language i.e. saying Sajjada, without saying it means a prayer mat is not helpful.
- Do know your stuff before engaging. Seek a fellow community member who has engaged with the media.
- Do encourage talented young people and put them in touch with journalists in the field.

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