

Young Muslims and experiences of stereotyping

RE Today's national Muslim youth survey (2022) enabled over 200 young British Muslim people aged 11–18 to give their views, opinions and ideas on wide-ranging questions that explore ways in which being a young Muslim in Britain today are perceived.

All the participants – in fairly representative proportions from England, Scotland and Wales – were invited to share their experience and views about prejudice and stereotyping.

Currently, RE seeks to use methods of social study more extensively as a part of its widening aims in building disciplinary knowledge among young people. This research data is ideal for these purposes, and teachers can use the material here with their pupils.

Here are five ideas:

- 1 Recap what your pupils know about stereotyping and prejudice.
- 2 Ask them to guess what young British Muslims might say about the experiences they have in Britain today connected to stereotyping and prejudice.
- 3 Share the sample of young Muslims' views given here – an effective way to do this is to give pupils the quotes on a set of cards to read and sort, by age or by profundity or into groups that make similar points.
- 4 Ask students to identify and analyse the issues in the sample. Point out that these young people are not generally 'annoyed', but the question specifically used this term when asking them about their experiences and ideas.
- 5 Can they add to the research? They could ask other Muslims the research questions below. This kind of homework task makes the pupils into researchers.

Safa, 13

I got called 'Shamima Begum' outside of Asda. This is happening to younger children: we just do our own thing, we are not harassing other people, but people call us terrorists. I feel like the media portrays us Muslims as all as bad as extremists.

Alisa, 14

It annoys me that the media always portrays us as terrorists and always puts us in the wrong. I think they could show the good side, the peaceful side of Islam, once in a while. One person doing wrong does not equal the whole religion.

Tyka, 17

Whenever Islam is mentioned in the media it is always in negative terms. The media uses examples quoting only a minority of Muslims or uses examples of totalitarian theocratic regimes who use religion as their means to justify their evil actions. The media ignores the millions of Muslims who contribute to society, who live their lives in the same way as their white neighbours. The media needs to acknowledge the existence of Muslims who live in the West, who are not oppressed, who choose their religion every day of their lives. The connotations of 'Islam' and 'Muslim' in the media need to change, but with the present situation this seems unlikely.

Amuna, 14

I am annoyed that the media portrays misconceptions about Islam and does not recognise the truth and beauty behind our religion. I think Muslims should show the truth by having good characters. My religion encourages peace.

Asha, 15

The media portrays Muslims as being backward and outdated, stuck in old-fashioned and traditional Islam. The media widely emphasises that Muslim women are the second-class citizens in Islam. But this could not be further from the truth in my experience. Muhammad completely changed the views on women in his society by placing extra emphasis on the roles that women in the community could take, and by having a daughter whom he loved in a society which often valued only sons.

Tasnya, 13

The British media portray Islam as a negative religion. For example, they exaggerate too much the amount of conflict between Muslims and the West. Just because one person committed a wrong action it does not mean all Muslims should be labelled for this. Educate people! Every individual is different!

Malaikah, 13

If you want to know about Islam, research first! Ask the children! Don't talk about it if you're not sure! The media never shows the peaceful way that Islam is. Instead they show every little mistake that us Muslims have made. We would have a more peaceful path if everyone followed an Islamic path.

Alijah, 15

The thing that annoys me about how the media portrays Islam is that it focuses on the negatives and the things that are not Islamic. Islam is the religion of peace and we don't agree with the bad things that make the news. Islam encourages helping others and respect for everyone and their beliefs. Furthermore the media encourages double standards and if [a] criminal commits a crime and they happen to be Muslim it is made to look as if the religion is to blame. However, if they commit a crime in the first place they are not going to be a good practising Muslim.

Salim, 15

It annoys me when bombers or the people who did 9/11 are called Muslims because I really don't feel that they act like a Muslim or even that they really are a Muslim - they just claim to be Muslims. I also get annoyed when people talk about Muslims as violent people who give women no human rights. I feel like they do and women and men are equal in Islam. I value the work of my teachers in the mosque massively, I feel they are more accustomed to modern day and really do help you tackle problems that Muslims face on a daily basis. They are funny but still manage to teach you the way of Islam.

Amina, 13

In my opinion the media portray Islam as a violent religion and only focuses on the negative events of the Islamic world. The press could highlight the positive and good side of Islam instead of showing one Muslim's wrong doing, because everyone from all different faiths makes mistakes. In recent years many Muslim countries have been destroyed killing thousands of Muslims including children, but the mainstream media ignores this.

Arej, 14

What annoys me about the media is that it only portrays us as bad evil people, presenting us as terrorists who heartlessly bomb innocent people. This really frustrates me because many people grow up believing what the media says about us: they hate or resent or become afraid of us. This makes me very sad because Islam literally means 'peace' and I don't want violence to be the first thing a person thinks of when my religion is mentioned only because of what they have seen in the media. I am proud of Islam because I know that it teaches us how to act and behave correctly, peacefully and respectfully. As Muslims we are taught to love, respect and be kind to one another. Islam teaches us not to cause conflicts or be violent. Islam teaches us how to be the best versions of ourselves.

Mahomad, 14

The negative views of Islam cause people to look away and give a negative opinion of the religion only because of the media. I don't think much will ever be able to be done about the pictures of Islam in the British media. I know of a British Muslim MP who was rejected for her views and many others suggest that Islam is not important or meaningful to the British people. Sad.

Jasmine, 18

I feel passionate about how badly the British media portrays this peaceful religion of mine. I think the media like to show terrorist attacks from Muslims but terror attacks have happened from all religions, all cultures and all races. Most Islamic countries are third world - I also feel as if the media don't cover these countries' situations of poverty because of Islamophobia. Islam is such a powerful religion that even after years of discrimination people still stick by the faith. The religion includes equality which makes me proud to be a part of Islam.

Ibrahim, 13

I want people just to think of Muslims as people because that's what we are, we just have a different religion to the majority.

Nurron, 13

I am annoyed by how one wrongdoing by a Muslim defines all of the rest of us for some. Those misled or mentally challenged Muslims (who do something dreadful) should be offered help instead of being used in the media. Just as all humans on earth should be offered help. Islam is the religion of peace, of manners, of justice and equality.

Hamza, 16

Within majority media Islam is portrayed as dangerous and something to be avoided with a focus on terrorism. Expressing their Islamophobic beliefs, several media companies work to navigate people away from Islam. Among today's generation, many people follow the beliefs of others rather than listening to the voice of their own mind, highlighting Islam as deteriorating and something to escape from. This influences viewers and readers to believe the same. However, dear reader, take time to think: is that really true? What is so significant about the media that leads the audience to instantly believe their words? I believe a media focus on positive aspects of Islam, working to encourage people to follow what they believe, is right. Rather than encouraging people to believe the negatives, this would lead to us being able to stand up for what we believe is right and true.

Akhil, 11

It makes me angry when people say *Allah hu Akbar*, God is great, before a terrorist attack. This is used out of context and by the wrong people. Islam has many amazing aspects such as charity that never get shown in the media - it is always just the negative things that happen that make it to the news. Muslims and Islam are not treated fairly like the other religions. I'm proud that I am part of a religion that only teaches good and not bad.

Mo, 16

I really dislike how Islam is portrayed so heavily in a way that it truly is not. Lots of people read these articles where evil groups and events are linked back to the religion even though they do not represent it or follow it in any correct way. And then they brand this beautiful religion with terms like 'violence' or 'oppression'. Then when seeing Muslims people do not give them a fair chance and have a preconception although they themselves have never tried to look into it for themselves. They have not tried reading the holy text that they brand as bad. They have not tried asking questions to practising Muslims. To give a fairer image people should, without prejudice, ask honest questions to reliable Islamic sources or at least not spread lies that they have heard!

Amelia, 12

What annoys me about the media portrayal of Islam is that they think we are oppressed and think women are forced to wear hijabs and forced to fast for Ramadan. To prevent this stereotyping we could allow Muslims to speak up and explain that they are comfortable with the peace of their faith and that Islam is a loving religion and accepts everyone who is willing to join.

Mugisha, 15

I am proud of the bond I have with every other Muslim and the guidance and the love and the commitment of my community. So it annoys me that the media assumes all Muslims are brown and avoids talk about Palestine and other wars, and gives poor interpretations of jihad. This is wrong. And I am not marrying my cousin.

Sahil, 17

The media portrayal of Islam is that we are all some sort of terrorist or weirdo which annoys me because the opposite is true. The religion is being attacked because of those who claim to do bad things in the name of Islam. This is annoying as it makes it seem like Muslims and Islam are bad but it is not true. In order for a fairer image of the religion to be seen society will have to use their eyes and common sense to see that the religion is not bad but is the exact opposite.

Hanaa, 13

People finding out that a Muslim man or woman who shot or committed a murder that affected everyone will influence the image of the Islamic religion. This then leads people's minds to think that all Muslims are like that, but that is not true. In Islam it doesn't say 'you have to shoot people' or 'commit crimes'. Islam is a religion of peace, where we only accept kindness. To give a fairer image of the religion we should think about this: if somebody is part of a Muslim terrorist organisation of course what they do is 100% wrong. But sometimes they have been drawn in to that kind of evil behaviour by others. Stereotypes like 'Muslims are terrorists' do not help the ways that other people view Islam. In my religion there is nothing that can cause harm to anyone or anything.

Ayeza, 15

Whenever there is a terrorist attack the media always blames Muslims - even though it might not be a Muslim. Not all Muslims support such acts of course! The media makes everyone believe that all are at fault when it is only a few. I am not saying that the Muslims who do these wrong actions are innocent. I am saying that only they are at fault and not all of the Muslims. Some people believe the media so much that if they see a Muslim they get scared of them. If the media only blames the people who have actually done the wrong acts rather than the whole of their race or religion or colour or ethnicity it would give a fairer image of all religions.

Mohammed, 13

To give a fairer image of our religion the media should show that many Muslims treat everyone the same because we all believe in one God, another one is to realise that Muslims like everyone else have feelings and what you say to them or about them can affect them. I'm proud that in Islam Allah accepts anyone into our religion and loves everyone because he made us all.

Taha, 14

Personally I'm irritated by the unfavourable portrayal of Islam and its culture by the media. We are depicted as a violent religious tradition. Only a small sector of Muslims actually acts like this. Why should all Muslims be harassed by the actions of so few? Media should attempt to present good sides of Islam in addition. Such as: Islam is the most peaceful religion and the words of the Prophet are used in high courts, for judgements all around the world, because during his time he was believed to be one of the most fair and trustworthy and just judges, so no biased approaches were used when his verdicts were made.

Aleema, 12

What annoys me is that everyone thinks that Muslims are terrorists and people are often scared when they see me wearing a hijab. They give me weird looks. What can be done to give a fairer image of Islam is to post the positive side. Just because one Muslim person is bad it does not mean they all are. My parents grew up in a Muslim country: everyone around them was Muslim, people at school, friends and neighbours, so it was a lot easier for them than it is for me now. Almost everyone around me is from a different religion and it makes it so much harder for me to live as a Muslim.

Nurun, 18

It's annoying how many people don't understand the true beauty of Islamic teaching and how many people misinterpret teachings or use inaccurate information to go against Muslim beliefs and values.

Amira, 18

Most of the media's portrayal of Islam is due to the fact that the journalists don't understand the religion. More conversations about Islam in society could massively help this. I feel like in recent years talking about Islam has become a taboo and most people just dismiss it whether they support the religion or not. I think that if people made more of an effort to understand the teachings of Islam it would definitely change its image, in the western media especially.

Zeinab, 11

What I found annoying about the stereotypes are that most people would call ME a terrorist. They think that if one Muslim is bad then all Muslims are bad - but in this case it is not true. There are different people in Islam and some do choose to be bad and I feel sad that someone thinks badly of me or my family for no real reason. What I think could be done to make it fairer is that people should start getting to know us to try to see that not all Muslims are terrorists. Sadly some people still think I am a bad person and I should die. It has become common. It is just life. We all have to deal with something like that some days.

Hamza, 14

I am annoyed that people think women are treated unfairly and that harsh punishments are given for small sins in Islam. In fact the religion spreads peace.

Eemaan, 13

When some people assume that we are terrorists because we are Muslims, that's annoying. It would be fairer to give an image that our religion is peaceful. I have recently started to feel peace when I've begun praying more often. If everyone followed an Islamic path, we would have a very calm society.

Isha, 15

I do believe there are some disgusting and ruthless people out there in the world who are Muslims and perform unforgivable actions. However, there is also a good side to Islam, which the media does not show at all on the news or in any online platform. Therefore I believe the media need to start sharing good stuff about Islam and raise awareness about how the majority of good Muslims out there are not involved in terrorism, as some like to say.

Salim, 13

Some of us are called dangerous because of the way some of us dress and the clothing we choose. What we wear should not offend you in any way. We do not judge the way you look because you are happy with your clothes. In the same way we wear clothes that make us happy. We should not be judged for it.

British Islam is too often associated with unfair Islamophobic stereotypes. What annoys you about the way the media portrays Islam and what can be done to give a fairer image of the religion?

Amida, 13

I really hate how the media only mentions Muslims in a negative light, or in the way that they only mention Muslim women when it's about the context of the hijab.

Aron, 14

I dislike the fact that people don't try and get to know you as a person because you're a Muslim. This is because the media portrays Islam in a bad way. I think people should get to know what Islam has to offer as a religion, because I agree that there are people in Islam who aren't the best of people, but there are many who are very understanding about other religions and open to other people's opinions.

Zara, 13

People judge Muslims every day just because we don't believe the same thing as most people in our society. They call our religion 'terrorist Islam'. It is not an easy religion to follow in this society, but to know that I am a Muslim makes me proud.

Maria, 16

The media often portrays Islam as a religion related to violence and threat. Whenever Islam is in the media it is often side by side with topics such as terrorism and oppression. This is unfair stereotyping – it has become the centre of many Muslim lives in Britain. Schools in Britain need to focus on breaking these unrealistic stereotypes and educate people on the true values of Islam, not the prejudice and discrimination of the media. One of the highlighted issues in the media is the lack of feminism in Islam. I personally disagree with this – Islam as a religion has held the position of women highly and treated them with respect. I feel the media portrays Islam as treating women as second-class citizens, and this perception needs to change. Islam is a religion which promotes rights of women. In my opinion it is a feminist religion, although I think the culture of certain countries shrouds this idea.

Nadia, 18

Islam is a welcoming religion that is open to all. The feeling of community, also known as Ummah, is central to myself. But if a Muslim commits a crime of hatred then the media is quick to label them as a terrorist whereas a white individual would be described as mentally ill.

A final task

Ask pupils to discuss what they have learnt from the research and write a paragraph in response to each of these four questions:

- 1 What surprised you about the ways young Muslims in this sample report their experiences?
- 2 How would you sum up what you have learnt?
- 3 Do you think the members of other religions would say similar or different things about their experience of prejudice and stereotyping in Britain?
- 4 Sometimes we learn from textbooks in RE – but what advantages are there in this method of reading what 'real Muslims' say?