

INSIGHT PACK

MUSLIM WOMEN AND GIRLS

2019



INTRODUCING OUR AUDIENCE

OUR AUDIENCE

The focus of this insight pack is Muslim girls and women. The pack will look at a range of factors affecting how active they are throughout their lives.

There is a diverse range of Muslim women living in the UK, each having different needs and pressures that shape their lives.

KEY FACTS

- Islam is the second largest religion in the UK after Christianity.
- The UK Muslim population is 2,786,635 (4.8% of the total population).
- London has the largest population of Muslims in the country.
- 47% of Muslims in the UK were born in the UK.
- The Muslim population is ethnically diverse, with significant numbers from every ethnic category included in the Census. The largest group define themselves as Asian. 1 in 12 are from white ethnic groups and 10% are from black ethnic groups.
- 46% of Muslims in England live in the 10% most deprived Local Authority Districts¹.

1. All information is from The Muslim Council of Britain (2015). British Muslims in numbers. A Demographic, Socio-economic and health profile of Muslims in Britain drawing on the 2011 Census.



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WOMEN IN ISLAM

BACKGROUND

Islam emphasises the spiritual equality of men and women, though it does differentiate their roles and responsibilities. Members of both sexes are responsible for ensuring they preserve their modesty with certain dress and behaviours³.

In addition to mosques, the place of worship for the Islam faith, Muslim communities form local groups that meet in a variety of spaces, such as homes, community or leisure centres. Women often form their own spaces. They often prefer separate provision so they feel more comfortable².

Visible expressions of Islam for women and men can be seen in Islamic clothing. Islamic clothing is one aspect of modesty- an important principle which both Muslim men and women value³.

Muslim women may choose to wear a niqab (headscarf) and/or the niqab (face veil). Muslim women and girls share multiple reasons for choosing to wear these items of clothing, which in some cases have become important statements of personal autonomy, choice and self-expression²

1. CREST (2017) British Muslims: A History
2. CREST (2017). British Muslims: Gender and Generations
3. Huda. "Islamic Clothing Requirements." Learn Religions, Jun. 25, 2019, learnreligions.com/islamic-clothing-requirements-2004252.

UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY

The ways in which Muslim women and girls interpret Islam is a personal choice, influenced by internal and external factors.

The majority of Muslims in the UK come from immigrant backgrounds. Major Muslim populations in the UK have origins in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Yemen and Somalia. Because of this, there are huge variations in gender norms that these families and individuals are socialised into, as well as the norms of the local environment they have experienced in the UK¹.

As a result, Muslim women have different cultures and backgrounds, speak different languages as well as hold additional sets of values linked to their upbringing and differing experiences of living in the UK.

Muslim women's interpretation of Islam and how they embed its values and principles into their daily lives will also differ according to their cultural views and attitudes. They will also experience the barriers and challenges that women of other or no religion also experience, such as a lack of confidence, balancing commitments and financial stresses².

There are significant generational differences in British Muslim communities. Some young people from Muslim families might have stricter attitudes than older generations, while others might have more flexible attitudes than their older family members¹.

1. CREST (2017) British Muslims: A History
2. CREST (2017). British Muslims: Gender and Generations
3. Huda. "Islamic Clothing Requirements." Learn Religions, Jun. 25, 2019, learnreligions.com/islamic-clothing-requirements-2004252.

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GENERATION 'M'

- 48% of Muslims in the UK are under the age of 25¹. Young Muslim women are referred to as 'Generation M'².
- Generation M are fully immersed in modern life. They believe that modernity can improve their own faith². They hold strongly their right to:
 - Equal participation
 - Equal respect
 - A full role in society²
- They demand this on their own terms as Muslims and increasingly, young women are choosing to practice Islam with confidence².
- There has been a change of attitude amongst some young Muslim women concerning the hijab. It is becoming a symbol of independence, assertiveness or defiance. The veil is being used to present a different way of asserting identity and as a form of resistance to challenge society's stereotypical images and assumptions³.

1. The Muslim Council of Britain (2015). British Muslims in numbers. A Demographic, Socio-economic and health profile of Muslims in Britain drawing on the 2011 Census
2. Janmohamed, S (2016). Generation M. Young Muslims Changing the World.
3. McKenna, U & Francis, J. (2019). Growing up female and Muslim in the UK: an empirical enquiry into the distinctive religious and social values of young Muslims.

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VALUES IN MUSLIM CULTURES

HEALTH

- In Islam, healthy lifestyles are encouraged for both men and women.
- Emphasis is placed on both physical and psychological health, and Muslims are encouraged to maintain a balanced diet, and remain active and healthy. This includes abstinence from alcohol and tobacco consumption¹.
- Muslim women's attitudes to sport and physical activity are shaped by factors such as the cost and the perceived inclusivity of the activity, for instance the diversity of participants, the allowance of alternative sportswear and friendliness.

MODESTY

- Hijab, as well as describing the headscarf, also describes the principle of modesty and includes behavior as well as dress for men and women².
- Modesty rules are open to interpretation. For example, some girls and women choose to cover every part of their body except their face. Others might not observe any special dress rules².

FAMILY

- Extended family structures (i.e. multi generations in one household) are extremely prevalent in Muslim societies³.
- Parents play an important role in modelling positive health behaviours³.
- In the UK, young Muslim adults are more likely to be married, and household size is generally larger than those of other religious groups³.
- Of Muslim women in the 16-74 age band, 18% are 'Looking after home or family', compared to 6% in the general population³.

1. Hussein Rassool G. (2014) Cultural Competence in Caring for Muslim Patients

2. https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/hijab_1.shtml

3. The Muslim Council of Britain (2015). British Muslims in numbers. A Demographic, Socio-economic and health profile of Muslims in Britain drawing on the 2011 Census.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES & STEREOTYPES

- Popular media, and increasingly social media, has repeatedly constructed Muslims as a monolithic group¹.
- Young Muslim women involved in a study conducted between 2008 and 2011 identified themselves as British citizens, but felt that others in society did not fully accept this; thus, identity and citizenship were not synonymous to them².
- Anti-Muslim hate monitoring group Tell MAMA found British Muslims were suffering an ‘explosion’ in faith-based hatred, with many Muslim women afraid to conduct their daily lives².
- Islamophobia, whether experienced personally or felt from society through rhetoric and media, can lead to Muslim women and girls being reluctant to engage with physical activity and sports where the symbols of their religion are more pronounced and visible³. When Muslim girls and women feel there is a negative perception of the hijab and niqab, then they can be less likely to engage in activities that highlight the symbols of their religion³.
- A number of sport governing bodies previously banned women from competing in hijabs, negatively affecting Muslim women’s participation in national and international sport. This is now starting to change.
- When sport deliverers, from schools to facilities, are not flexible in their sport offer to engage Muslim girls and women, then Muslim women and girls can become disengaged from physical activity³.

1. CREST (2017) British Muslims: Demography and Communities
2. McKenna, U & Francis, J. (2019). Growing up female and Muslim in the UK: an empirical enquiry into the distinctive religious and social values of young Muslims.
3. McGee J & Hardman K. (2012). Muslim Schoolgirls’ identity and participation in school-based physical education in England.



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LET'S GET PHYSICAL

**PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL
ACTIVITY**

MUSLIM WOMEN

DAILY LIFE

- 57% of Muslim women aged 25-49 are in employment compared to 80% of the general population¹.
- The barriers that British Muslim women face to being active also affect a significant number of non-Muslim women. These include fear of judgement, lack of confidence and insufficient time.
- British Muslim women can also face additional challenges, such as finding activities that are single-sex and have flexible clothing policies.

HEALTH

- Muslim women's health in later life is not as good overall when compared to the general population. Only 22% of Muslim women aged over 65 are in very good or good health compared to 47% of women overall¹.
- Additionally, 38% of Muslim women over 65 are in bad or very bad health compared to just 16% of women overall¹.
- Of women in the 65+ age category, 48% self-declared themselves as having a disability that limited their activity, compared to 29% of non-Muslim women¹.
- More generally, the Muslim population is more susceptible to the three 'D's'- Diabetes, Dementia and Depression².

VISIBILITY IN SPORT

- The emergence of Muslim women wearing the hijab winning Olympic medals and featuring in campaigns such as Sport England's This Girl Can is breaking down barriers and challenging stereotypes³.
- In 2016, Ibtihaj Muhammad made headlines as the first American athlete to compete in a hijab during the Olympics, winning a bronze in fencing⁴.
- Bahrain's Roqaya Al-Gassra wore a hijood (hijab combined with a sports hood) in the women's 200m final at the 2006 Asian Games in Doha, winning gold⁵.

1. The Muslim Council of Britain (2015). British Muslims in numbers. A Demographic, Socio-economic and health profile of Muslims in Britain drawing on the 2011 Census.

2. CREST (2017). British Muslims: Gender and Generations

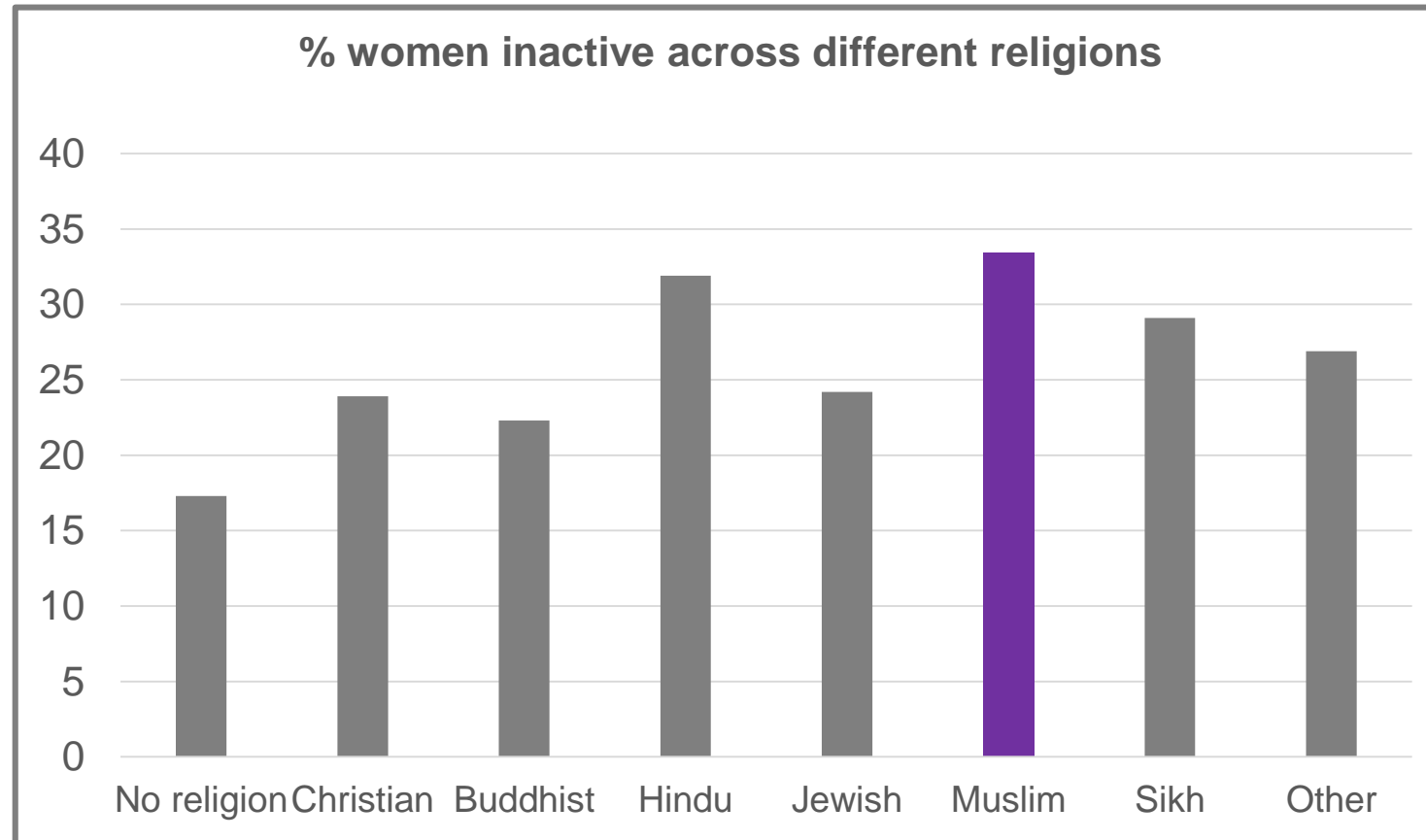
3. <https://www.sportengland.org/our-work/women/this-girl-can/>

4. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/24/books/ibtihaj-muhammad-fencing-hijab-olympics.html>

5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/muslim-sprinter-wins-olympic-sprint-dressed-head-to-toe-in-a-hijab-6927361.html>

SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR MUSLIM WOMEN

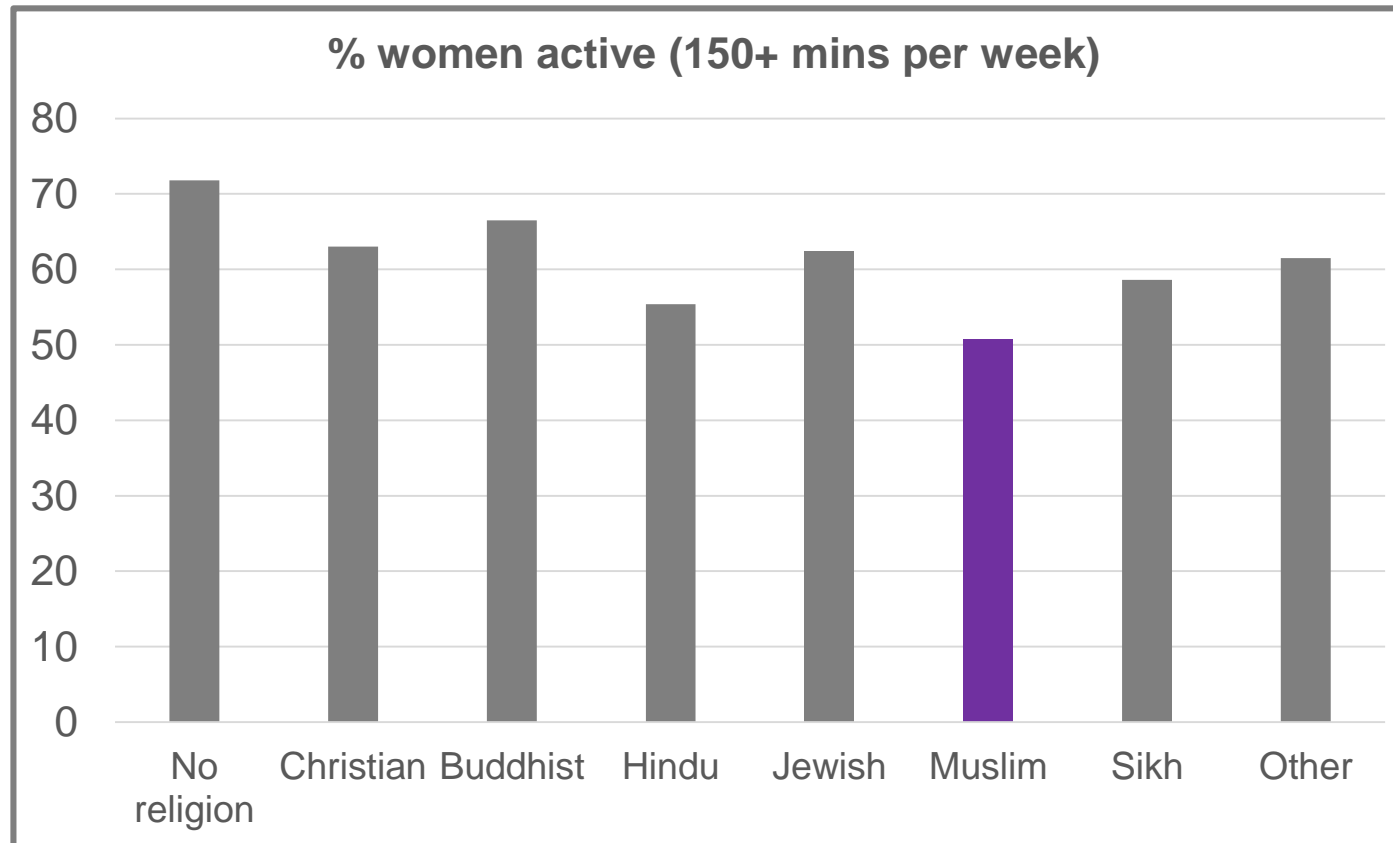
In England, Muslim women are more likely to be inactive (doing less than 30 minutes of moderate activity per week) than other women.



1. Sport England (2019) Active Lives November 2017/2018 Data.
<https://www.sportengland.org/adultnov1718tables/>

SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR MUSLIM WOMEN

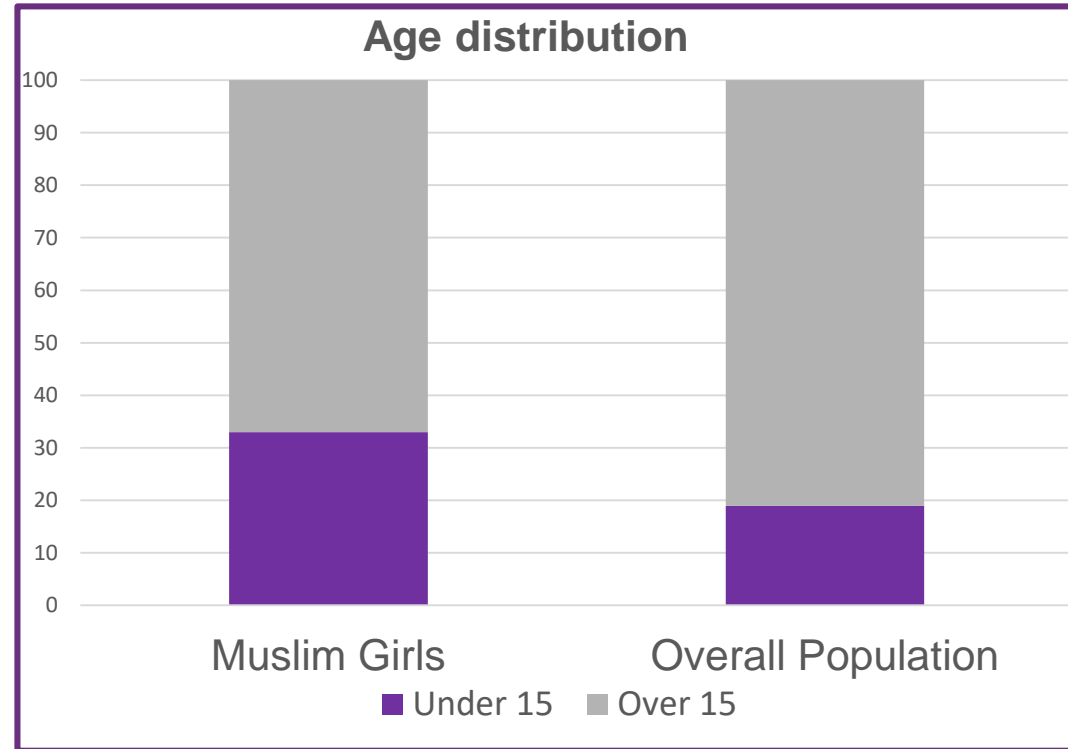
Only 50.7% of Muslim women are active in England (doing at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week) compared to 72% of women of no religion and 63% of women of Christian faith.



1. Sport England (2019) Active Lives November 2017/2018 Data.
<https://www.sportengland.org/adultnov1718tables/>

MUSLIM GIRLS

- 33% of Muslim girls were under the age of 15 in 2011, compared to 19% of the overall population¹.
- While Muslims form 4.8% of the population overall, 8.1% of all school-age children (5 to 15 age band) are Muslim¹.
- The percentage of Muslim children of schools age is very high in some inner city boroughs. In Tower Hamlets, London, over 60% of all children aged between 5 and 15 years of age are Muslim¹.



1. The Muslim Council of Britain (2015). British Muslims in numbers. A Demographic, Socio-economic and health profile of Muslims in Britain drawing on the 2011 Census.

SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR MUSLIM GIRLS

Positive experiences of sport and physical activity for all girls is essential in forming positive attitudes and behaviours towards physical activity later in life.



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- Islam supports the rights of all children to participate in physical education and encourages attention to physical health alongside spiritual health in the holistic upbringing of Muslim children¹.
 - There is equal attention to health and the importance of exercise for boys and girls².
 - Attention to modesty relates to both boys and girls of all ages, but predominantly following puberty².

1. Shared Practical Guidance From Birmingham Schools (2008). Improving Participation of Muslim Girls in Physical Education and School Sport
2. McGee J & Hardman K. (2012). Muslim Schoolgirls' identity and participation in school-based physical education in England.

HOW TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION



CONSIDERATIONS

Muslim women in the UK are a diverse group. Treating them as a monolithic group will fail to engage those who are not already taking part in physical activity and sport.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Consultation with the intended users of the sport or physical activity is important to understand the motivations, needs and challenges that will enable or prevent Muslim women and girls from participating. Making assumptions about these will result in the sports offer being insensitive to the diverse experiences of individuals. Consulting with the parents of girls may also help to identify needs to consider. Utilising the spaces often established by groups of Muslim women and girls to conduct consultations will help in reaching those who are not engaged and understanding their needs.

Using consultation to also understand the everyday lives of women and girls will help to make sure that the sports offer is successful. Capturing more practical details such as what sports might be of interest, the best timings and requirements in terms of location and facility are some steps that can help to ensure the sports offer is attractive and appropriate. This [Sport England publication](#) provides advice on how to conduct a consultation.

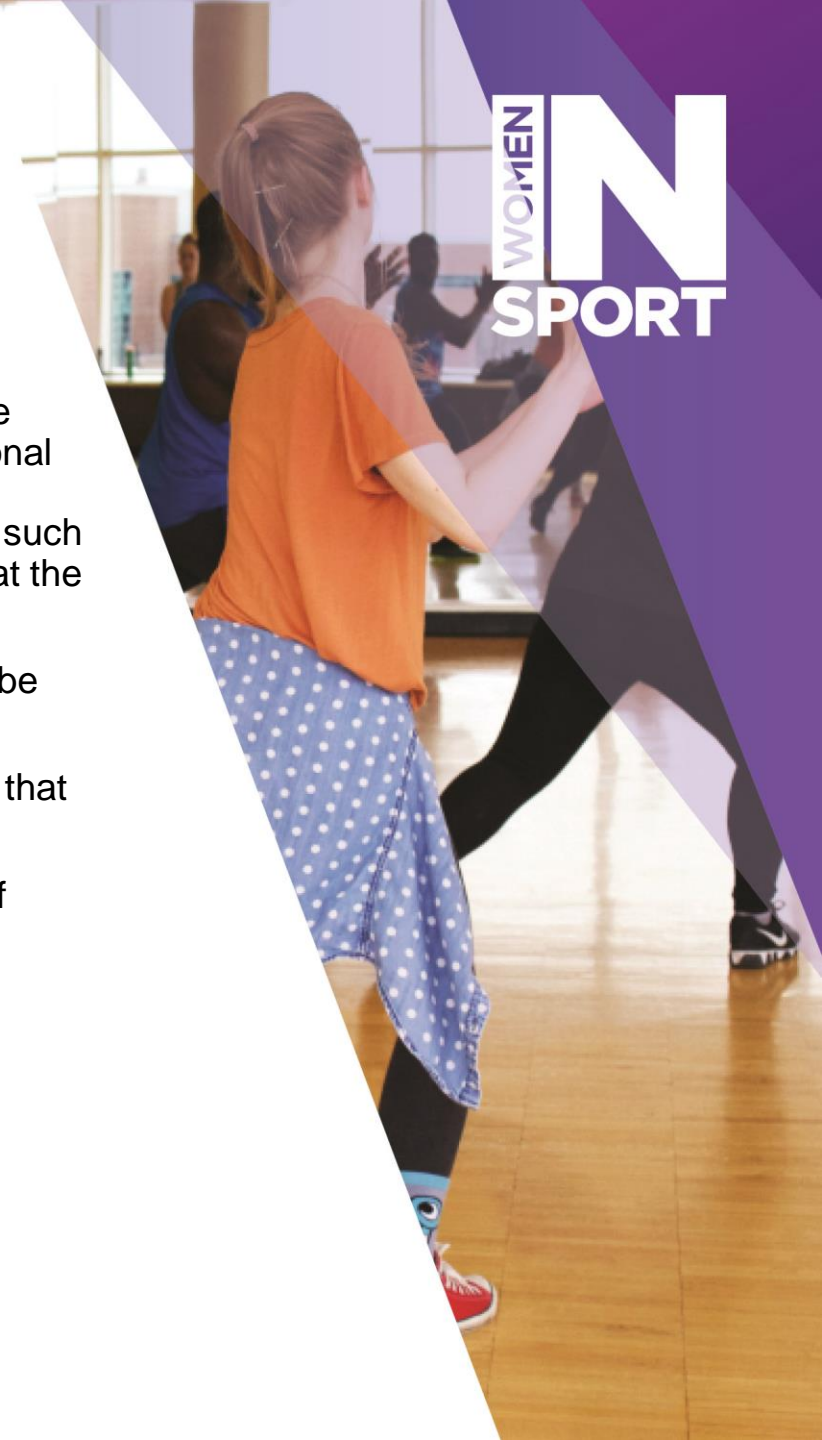
For consultation to be effective, resources should be available to respond to the needs identified, especially when considering the requirement for modesty. These may include a requirement for:

- Gender segregated spaces.
- Providing females coaches, points of contact and lifeguards.
- Separate changing rooms.

ENGAGING MUSLIM WOMEN & GIRLS

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promotion: Use relatable role models and people within the local Muslim community to promote sports opportunities. Using images of Muslim women and girls participating in sport in promotional materials can increase awareness of the possibilities, as long as you have permission from participants to use these images. Include relevant information that will put participants at ease, such as that sessions are led by a female coach in a private space. This will provide reassurance that the needs of Muslim girls and women have been considered and met.
- Sport in schools: Consult with girls and their parents to ensure that the right steps are taken to be inclusive and responsive to the specific needs of Muslim girls.
- Enable Muslim girls to wear clothes they feel comfortable in. This removes the potential barrier that adhering to Islam dress protocols presents.
- Be aware of holidays such as Ramadan, when rituals such as fasting might impact the ability of Muslim students to participate in P.E. and other physical activities.
- Enable privacy, such as private areas for changing in changing rooms and separated showers.



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ENGAGING MUSLIM WOMEN & GIRLS



FACILITIES

The consultation process may highlight requirements of the facility which need to be considered to engage individuals.

Finding the right facility or environment to deliver sessions can be important to assure that Muslim women are comfortable participating in the sport or physical activity- this can be determined through the consultation process. The following may need to be considered:

- Whether privacy whilst participating can be assured, e.g. covering viewing panels and windows if needed.
- What other activities are delivered at the same time, particularly if males will be participating close by.
- Whether changing and showering facilities are appropriate, such as the provision of individual changing cubicles.
- The surroundings of the facilities, especially considering that Muslims abstain from eating pork or drinking alcohol.

SPORTS INITIATIVES AND USEFUL ORGANISATIONS



- [Muslim Girls Fence](#) - 'Muslim Girls Fence' is a collaboration between Maslaha and British Fencing aiming to challenge misperceptions of and raise aspirations among young Muslim women, who often experience complex discrimination on the basis of both faith and gender. The programme works with schools, running ten week programmes including fencing sessions as well as immersive and creative Maslaha workshops exploring identity, self-expression and challenging stereotypes. Community projects have been running across Birmingham, Doncaster and London.
- [Brunel University](#) in London became the first UK university to offer a sports hijab as part of their university kit in 2019. The initiative stems from an investigation by the students' union that found a gap in BAME female sports participation and that there were barriers to Muslim women taking part in team sports.
- [Muslim Women's Sport Foundation \(MWSF\)](#) - The MWSF is a volunteer-led charity aiming to increase the involvement of Muslim women and girls in sport without compromising their religious or cultural values through catering to and raising awareness of their specific needs.
- [Sporting Equals](#) - Sporting Equals exists to promote ethnic diversity across sport and physical activity. Originally set up in 1998 by Sport England, in partnership with the Commission for Racial Equality, they are now an independent and registered charity. Sporting Equals works with mosques to drive up sports participation of inactive communities.

CASE STUDY

MAKING LEARNING MORE INCLUSIVE

A partnership with Essex FA, Muslimah Sport, Sporting Equals, London Sport and Vision Redbridge identified the need for an Inclusive Level 1 course targeting local BAME Muslim women who are often hard to engage. The project was the first one to be delivered by the County FA, utilising a community venue to make the course more accessible for local women¹.

Essex FA sourced female tutors in order to support the beliefs of the learners. This was vital as it is one of the main barriers that can stop many women attending a course to support education in an environment which would conform to their cultural beliefs.

The course was delivered over a six week period, and 15 women successfully completed and gained a FA Level 1 Coaching Award.

The women are now utilising their qualification in a school setting, charter standard club or female recreational session.

<http://www.sportingequals.org.uk/news-and-blogs/sport-bodies-join-forces-to-support-asian-womens-sport-participation-in-east-london.html>

**Case Study
Inclusive Level 1**

MSA
ESSEX COUNTY FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION
1883

Very supportive, on hand to help!
Quote from learner

All 15 females successfully completed the Level 1 Coaching Course

Superb, relaxed and quality learning environment!
Quote from learner

After consultation new facilities were sourced, with female tutor to deliver the course

First attempt revealed barriers i.e. facilities

Overcome both cultural and personal barriers
Quote from learner

Consultation took place between Essex FA, MSA and Vision Redbridge

MSA
ESSEX COUNTY FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION
Vision Redbridge Culture & Leisure

@EssexCountyFA
EssexFootball
EssexFA
www.essexfa.com

REFERENCES

BBC(2009) Religions: Hijab https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/hijab_1.shtml.

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Huda (2019) Learn Religions. Islamic Clothing Requirements. learnreligions.com/islamic-clothing-requirements-2004252.

Hussein Rassool G (2014) Cultural Competence in Caring for Muslim Patients.

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Thank you to Muslimah Sports Association for support in creating this resource

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Get Out
Get Active

