

# Understanding Crime: Muslim Parents' Perspectives

October 2020

Findings Report

## The Think Tank Programme

The programme is aimed at enabling Muslim women to represent their lived experiences and needs within research policy and practice. MWC endeavours, through this programme, to ensure that Muslim women of all backgrounds can seriously influence policy and decision making at all levels. Muslim women have been used by researchers when it has suited their research projects and government agendas, regurgitating the tired and reductive narratives about 'the Muslim woman'. Women we have worked with over the years have increasingly expressed their frustration with being used as 'subjects' for research agendas framed by others and now want their unmediated voices to be heard.

We aim to enrich and correct the knowledge landscape by ensuring that new relevant research is produced directly by Muslim women on issues that they feel are important to them & their communities, building trust between communities and research institutes. The evidence, recommendations and solutions generated by them will be used to show how the government and both the public and private sectors can help create conditions that allow Muslim women to thrive.

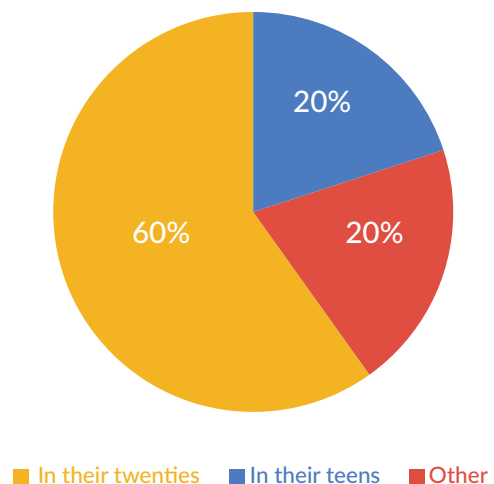
Through creating an army of community researchers who themselves have full awareness of the issues within their communities, women are being empowered to be authors of solutions that bring about societal change. We are creating a legacy of future leaders, community researchers and advocates who will inspire others around them. The findings will be available on our website, through social media outlets, and will also be shared with local authorities and government departments.

## What This Study Covers

This study aims to examine the experiences and views of 54 Muslim women from Bradford aged between 25 and 66 on parenting children involved in crime. The Think Tank community research teams identified this as an under-researched topic and were keen to draw attention to what they know from experience is an issue that impacts Muslim women as mothers, sisters, aunts, and grandparents.

The Muslim women included in the study were identified through the formal and informal networks of the researchers and were asked a range of questions about their views and experiences of parenting children involved in crime. 1 in 2 of the women interviewed was born in Pakistan, while most of the others were born in the UK. 3 in 5 of all the women became parents in their twenties and 1 in 5 in their teens. Approximately one third of the women were single.

The age that participants became parents



## Key Findings

### Understanding Parenting

- ▶ 7 in 10 women believed that their parenting style is not determined by their children's gender.
- ▶ And while 2 in 5 described an 'authoritarian' parenting style as the most effective, only 1 in 10 used the term to describe their own parenting style.
- ▶ All women believed faith had a very important role to play in parenting, however, 2 in 5 chose to stress moral principles rather than faith as the most important duty for a parent.

### Understanding Crime

- ▶ 9 in 10 women talked to their children about crime and 1 in 10 knew a young person who had been involved in criminal activity.
- ▶ 2 in 5 women said they would discuss crime with their children to attempt to understand why a crime is committed by young people.

### Support Networks

- ▶ Half of the women said they would ask for support and guidance from their family members (e.g. parents, siblings and aunts).
- ▶ 7 in 10 women believed that faith leaders had an important role to play in countering crime.
- ▶ And 2 in 5 felt faith leaders failed to play an active role in supporting young people and their families in challenging criminal behaviour.



## Key Recommendations

- 🔑 Culturally-sensitive targeted support for Muslim parents of 'at risk' children by statutory sector commissioners, specialist mental health charities and other funding providers.
- 🔑 Collaborative working with Muslim institutions and mosques to i) develop religion-based support services and awareness raising programmes for parents and children; and ii) improve the literacy of Islamic professionals and leaders about youth crime and its social impact on their communities through tailored training.
- 🔑 Collaborative working with law enforcement to understand youth crime and develop restorative justice programmes that help offenders recognise the impact on their victims.
- 🔑 Community organisations, including faith-based ones, to provide parenting workshops and help create and facilitate support networks that address local needs.
- 🔑 Incorporate services that provide general and religious advice and awareness for Muslim women and their families through supporting the first women-governed mosque initiative of the MWC.

# Findings Expanded

## Views and experiences of parenting

All women mentioned faith as an important basis for parenting, and 2 in 5 felt their faith was central to their parenting. One asserted that: "It's an important part in the way I look after my kids," and another described her faith-based parenting as being focused on "transmitting a moral compass to my kids."

However, 2 in 5 chose to stress teaching moral principles as the most important duty of a parent without mentioning religion. This suggests a potential shift toward stressing widely shared societal values inspired by but not explicitly identified by faith.

Interestingly, not many women (only 1 in 10) translated the importance of faith or moral values into an 'authoritarian' parenting style despite saying it could be the most effective sometimes (interviewers had discussed and described different types of parenting styles with women).

7 in 10 women did not feel their children's gender should impact their parenting style, and some women explained that any gender differentiation by parents negatively affects daughters, leaving them feeling unfairly treated and in some cases pushing them to become rebellious. One woman, however, explained that whilst equality is ideal, mothers may be overprotective in order to mitigate different gendered expectations within the community.



The remaining women who accepted gender differentiation as necessary explained that girls need more attention as they leave their families after marriage. A woman justified this parenting attitude as Islamic in her view: "In Islam, girls should be separated from boys at the age of 8-9 and must learn modesty". Interestingly, those women did not comment on parallel Islamic instructions and guidance for boys on modesty, or the need for boys to understand and respect girls/women.

Overall, there is evidence suggesting that Muslim women valued gender parity in bringing up girls and boys. They expressed awareness of wider societal inequalities and the challenges mothers face when balancing between protecting daughters from being judged by others while not treating them differently.



# Crime

## Talking to children about crime

9 in 10 women talked to their children about crime and felt they would know if their children became involved in criminal activity. Some explicitly mentioned crimes such as drugs, knife crime, fights, theft and bullying. 1 in 5 women stressed moral and social consequences of crime. One woman elaborated:

**“We discuss right and wrong and relate it to how it would affect us personally”.**

Those who did not broach the subject mentioned the age of their children or the low crime rates in their area.



## Parental response to learning a child is involved in crime

1 in 10 women knew a young person that had been involved in criminal activity. More than half cited bad/wrong company as an influencing factor. Other factors included peer pressure, lack of parental attention and involvement due to absence from the home. One woman added that the “blind trust of the parents” had been a contributory factor to a young person becoming involved in crime.

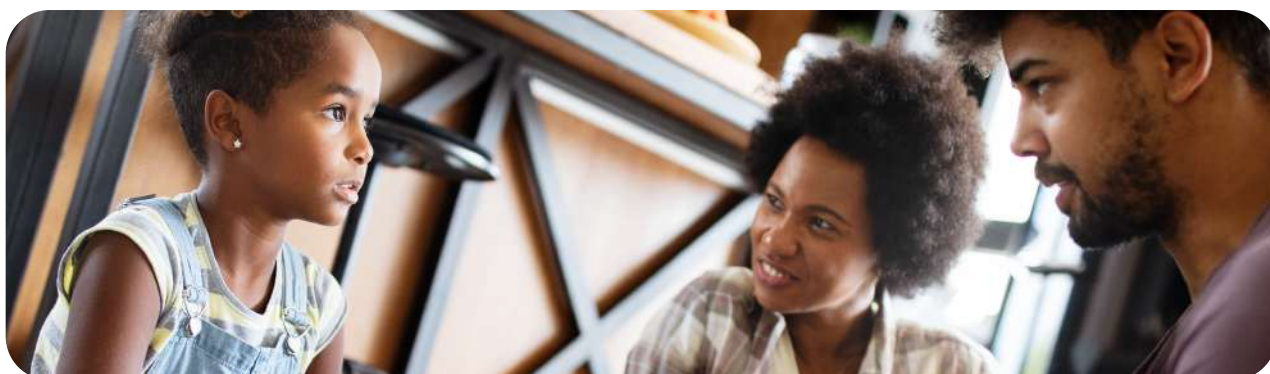
2 in 5 women would discuss the matter with their child to attempt to understand why. Women also indicated they would want to explain and make clear that the behaviour was wrong and was not acceptable.

A quarter reported emotional responses such as anger, sadness, disbelief, disappointment and stress. One woman, who related her own story, highlighted how her parents’ excessive anger made her feel neglected and needing empathy and understanding as a young woman. This resonates with another interviewee who worked in law enforcement: “My job was a deterrent (police)...but in hindsight I could have been a more effective listener”.

A significant number of women (2 in 5) chose positive action as an effective response to criminal behaviour, for example, speaking to and gaining advice/support from other professionals; engaging the child in extracurricular activities; and talking and counselling.

And half of the women mentioned ‘negative consequences’ to counter the child’s criminal behaviour. This included removal of their child’s electronic gadgets.

A small group of women (15%, 8) would resort to stronger interventions such as removing their children from certain company and peers.



## Parents of 'at risk' children

Only 2 in 5 women responded to this question. One woman shared her experience of when her child became at risk of involvement in crime, "I spoke to them, listened and after that tried to determine what had provoked the behaviour and then was able to deal with it". Another woman stressed making the child aware of "the shame that would follow as teachers and friends would find out".

## Support Networks

### The role of faith community/leaders in reducing young peoples' involvement in crime

7 in 10 women believed faith leaders had an important role to play in raising awareness of crime and how to eliminate it, but 2 in 5 felt faith leaders failed to do so. Some felt that a faith perspective would embed a moral compass in the youth and also open up the discussion within families.

Half the women would ask for support and guidance from their family members such as parents, siblings and aunties, and a quarter would seek religious guidance from the Quran, online Islamic websites, courses and scholars. Another quarter wanted to see more support form youth centres, community centres, schools, and the Police.



## Developing The Think Tank Programme

We recruited women from the community through our various networks and partners in the Bradford area, such as the Women's Health Network, voluntary organisations such as Sharing Voices and Womenzone Community Centre, and MWC's social media platforms. The response was overwhelming, reassuring us that there is a dire need for this ground-up approach to research. We selected women between the ages of 18 and 55, who are mostly of Pakistani background. The women have come from different professional fields, including law, community outreach, interfaith work, mental health, activism, civil service, journalism, education and media.

Over a period of 3 months, the women attended a training and development programme with six modules covering a broad range of transferable skills, such as confidence building, communication skills, critical thinking, debating skills, verbal reasoning and basic research skills. In addition, there were two academic modules on developing interview schedules, conducting fieldwork, and applying research ethics, such as obtaining consent and maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.

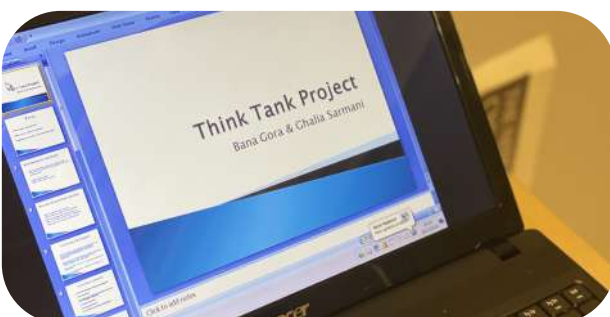
This training and capacity building were overseen by a Project Coordinator, who designed and delivered the Think Tank programme, facilitated the process and offered a constant point of reference and guidance during fieldwork preparation and implementation. The programme also facilitated the emergence of a personal network of intellectual and emotional support between the women on the Think Tank programme, that would prove crucial during the fieldwork stage.

## Conducting The Research

On completion of the training, the second phase of the programme focussed on the research. The women who completed the training programme then carried out the interviews for the four research studies. The group identified a list of key research areas emerging from their lived experiences, some of these areas were difficult and rarely addressed in research. This was then narrowed down to a shortlist of four. The women decided to implement four concurrent studies, organising themselves into smaller community research teams and conducting a minimum of 50 interviews in each of the areas identified. The MWC Think Tank project team provided support with research design and implementation.

The subsequent interview stage lasted for six weeks during which the community researchers were remarkably successful in gaining access and trust within the communities they approached. A wide range of views was captured in all of the studies, as many of the women interviewed shared genuine personal experiences on many sensitive topics.

The process of writing-up reports involved consulting the women researchers and was supported by Dr Shuruq Naguib (Lancaster University) and Dr Ghalia Sarmani (University of Central Lancashire).



## Muslim Women's Council

MWC is unique in its local, national, and international reach. We deliver services to the most marginalised members of our communities; the homeless, the excluded and disadvantaged. Our initiatives have addressed community issues ranging from mental health, child sexual exploitation and food poverty.

At the other end of the spectrum, we provide thought leadership and we facilitate and enable change. For example, we have initiated a project to transform and lead discourse on women's access to, presence in, and involvement in Mosques. This initiative has gained national and international support and has been reported globally.

Looking ahead in a context of political turbulence and uncertainty, we have prioritised empowering Muslim women to narrate their lived experiences and make an intervention into policies impacting their lives.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our funders The National Lottery Community Fund Lived Experience Leaders Pilot Programme, the Smallwood Trust & Welcome Trust for believing in our vision and supporting us to achieve it.

We wish to convey our sincere thanks to our community research teams for their sustained commitment, passionate dedication and insightful input into developing the research themes and questions and implementing four cogent and timely studies. We would like to express sincerest gratitude to all our interviewees, without whom this would not have been possible.



"The Muslim Women's Council core team provided highly professional support to the Think Tank project, with excellent administrative and research coordination throughout the process.

The final reports are the fruits of genuine and outstanding commitment to the vision of community-based research and to the process of co-production with the women researchers."

**Dr Shuruq Naguib** (Chair, Muslim Women's Council)



## Quotes from interviewees

*"He was involved in the wrong crowd. Drugs, illegally driving cars, he had suffered some trauma earlier in his life and was vulnerable. He then got groomed by [drug] dealers for their own gain. Really I think he was just looking for approval and affection."*

*"It is almost like a Banksy painting... you see the mosque fundraising thousands, ordering the gold dome from the Middle East... positioning it with great pride over the top of the mosque. All the while seemingly blind to the criminal activity in drugs, theft and carjacking that happen literally right below their eye lines just outside the boundary of the mosques. The mosque fundraisers always emphasise the message of building a mosque and the rewards of it in the afterlife, but surely the rewards for saving an individual, a family, a community are also noteworthy both in this life and the next...no? So why don't our Imams ever speak of this in their Khutbas?"*

## Case Study



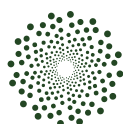
### Parental involvement is key at every stage

Aisha\* saw her older brother Atif\* deal drugs in the backstreets around their home when he was aged 14. Aisha, then aged 12, was told to keep quiet about it. She said her brother told her he did not use the drugs himself but just did dealing for extra pocket money. He joked and said he would use the money to save up for a fast car. Atif couldn't wait to pass his driving test and get behind the wheel. He would treat Aisha every now and then to trainers and nice clothes. Their parents did not know anything about Atif's drug dealing.

Atif's first arrest came at the age of 16, when he was released with a caution. This was the first time his parents became aware of his involvement in criminal activity. His second arrest resulted in a custodial sentence. Aisha told us "My parents took it really hard....my mum got really depressed and stopped going out of the house and having visitors. My dad had worked hard all his life in the factory doing night shifts - he was angry that Atif was throwing away his life...they didn't know what to do. But they both got really tough with the rest of us."

"When Atif got out of prison my parents set ground rules he had to stick to if he was going to live at home- no drugs, no late nights out, and he had to get a job. Atif managed the second two, but I don't know if he managed to stay away from drugs. Three months later I saw him talking to a guy in a black BMW, he had dark glasses on and looked a bit shady...Atif moved out the very next day. We haven't seen him since. That was two years ago."

*\*Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.*



**MUSLIM  
WOMEN'S  
COUNCIL**



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