



# FAITH, FAMILY AND CRIME

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An exploration of Muslim families' involvement with the Criminal Justice System and its impact on their health and social needs

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Report funded by:



## FAITH, FAMILY AND CRIME

**An exploration of Muslim families' involvement with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and its impact on their health and social needs**

# INTRODUCTION

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Arooj has more than 10 years of community-based experience working to deliver holistic, culturally appropriate, and specific support services to BAME and Muslim offenders/ex-offenders and their families, particularly within South Asian communities.

In 2014, Arooj produced a report based on original research with 115 Muslim people with criminal convictions. This research highlighted a range of structural, cultural and religious factors that impacted on the rehabilitation of Muslim people leaving prison or completing a community sentence.

In 2017, with support from Barrow Cadbury Trust, Arooj, in partnership with Professor Edward Abbott-Halpin at Leeds Beckett University and Dr Christine Hough from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), started a project to look in more depth at the issues which arose from the 2014 research, through one-to-one interviews with prisoners' families from Muslim communities across the North West.

It is hoped that the research will identify for Muslim families a range of available support services for when a family member is involved with the CJS as well as make policy recommendations for the CJS, policy-makers and NGOs working with prisoners' families.



# AIMS

## THE MAIN AIMS OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT WERE:

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**1**

To investigate how a family member's involvement with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) affects Muslim families and their social and health needs.

In particular:

- the attitudes of Muslim families towards offenders /ex-offenders in their household;
- some of the barriers faced by Muslim families in accessing mainstream support services;
- the role of Muslim families and Faith organisations in supporting offenders/ex-offenders.

**2**

For the findings to benefit Muslim families and policy makers through providing:

- an increased understanding of how involvement with the CJS affects relationships within the family (nuclear and extended) and the wider community
- the underlying issues that affect different family members (particularly partners and children) and the levels of awareness, amongst Muslim families, of the support services that are available to them.



# KEY FINDINGS

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## 1

**100% of the families** were suffering from negative and sometimes extreme mental and physical problems as a direct result of involvement with the CJS.

*"I've had depression...on medication and have difficulties in coping/managing all this.... I am struggling financially too". "It has left me emotionally scarred and drained."*

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## 2

**Muslim men**, in the majority of cases, do not inform the women in the family when family members have been arrested and are going through (legal) court processes.

*"The men in the family dealt with everything....I had no idea until he was in prison".*

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## 3

**Muslim families have very little information** about any of the CJ processes involved, from arrest to conviction. None of the families were aware of pre-sentence reports, nor did they have any idea of the significance of the pre-sentence report for the final sentencing report.

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## 4

Some aspects of **Muslim family culture** actually present barriers to family members accessing support services. The majority of the families had no awareness of any organisation that provided specific help – apart from Arooj.

**“**The biggest barrier was my family. Although they dealt with everything they never told me about his offending – except when he was sent to prison **”**

**“**What's happening to our community? Parents should teach right from wrong – tell them what is Halal and Haram **”**

5

**Imams and Mosques** do not engage with, nor do they provide support to, families who are going through the processes of the CJS.  
*“Our organisations [the Mosques] should be doing more to stop the young ones from getting involved with drugs [crime].*

*“Mosques can't help, they don't have the knowledge that Arooj do, they should work with Arooj”.*

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**26% of the respondents** specifically stated that the “wrong crowd” and “the local, older lads with flashy cars” were to blame for grooming their family member into crime. Also, in some instances, the draw towards/involvement in criminal behaviour resulted in individuals behaving counter to the basic tenets of their Islamic faith.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

**1** The recommendations of the Lammy Review, 2017 and the Young Review report, 2014 should be implemented speedily to reduce disproportionate numbers of Muslims in the criminal justice system.

**2** Research by the Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance<sup>1</sup> provided evidence of bias against Muslims in the criminal justice system. Training of criminal justice professionals, including sentencers, should include cultural awareness training to eliminate this.

**3** Solicitors and other professional advisors should be aware of the impact of traditional family structures on the relatives (particularly the female relatives) of those they represent. They should ensure that families are referred to sources of support, and should encourage their clients to talk to their families about their situation.

**4** Where there is a significant cultural difference between the defendant and the judge or magistrate, pre-sentence report writers should highlight the cultural environment and the support structures offered in the community. If the report writer is not aware of these factors, the case should be adjourned. Report writers should conduct interviews with the defendant and if possible engage with the family to gather details of the defendant's home life, and of the role the family and community can play in supporting rehabilitation.

**5** Prison staff, including those staffing reception and visiting areas should be made aware of the particular needs and vulnerabilities of Muslim families, particularly in prisons where Muslim prisoners are in a minority.

*“...the prison officers don't understand cultural issues and feelings”*

<sup>1</sup>. [https://www.t2a.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Young\\_Muslims\\_on\\_Trial.pdf](https://www.t2a.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Young_Muslims_on_Trial.pdf)



## CHARITIES AND FUNDERS

- 1** Charities (and other support services) should be aware of the specific cultural issues and needs of Muslim families and take these into account when offering services. They should develop action plans to ensure the inclusion of ethnic, faith and cultural groups under-represented in their services. Advice from, or partnership with, Muslim community groups, should be sought.
- 2** Funders should ensure that organisations they fund have explicit, actioned strategies to include Muslim and other excluded client groups.

## HEALTH SERVICES

- 1** GPs and mental health support services should be aware of the profound impact, particularly on the women in the family, of having a relative in the criminal justice system.

## MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

- 1** Mosques and Imams should have training to enable them to provide support and basic counselling to meet the needs of Muslim families with relatives in the criminal justice system.
- 2** Those with influence in the community should encourage heads of families to involve women relatives in discussion of important issues affecting the family, even when these are difficult or relate to "izzat" (honour).

*“...My Imam struggled to answer some basic questions”*

## **The research team comprises:**

- Mohammad Hanif and Tariq Mahmood from Arooj,  
a third sector charitable organisation.
- Dr Christine Hough, co-researcher and academic,  
University of Central Lancashire.
- Professor Edward Abbott-Halpin project investigator,  
co-researcher and academic, Leeds Beckett University and  
Visiting Professor at Open University, Citizenship and Governance.

If you would like an online version of the full report you can download it on this Barrow Cadbury Trust web page: [www.barrowcadbury.org.uk/project-and-research-publications/](http://www.barrowcadbury.org.uk/project-and-research-publications/)

### **Report funded by:**



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