

Growing up as a Muslim woman in the UK

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Muslims first entered the UK in the 16th Century and have been an integral part of Britain and its history much longer than can be imagined. Today, the Muslim population are almost all people who immigrated to Britain in the mid 20th century or their descendants. The last Census results of 2011 revealed that Muslims make approximately 3 million of the population, almost half of them women. Some may wonder how Muslims, especially women maintain their identity while seeking to succeed in Britain. Many

misconceptions are drawn from some media reports of isolated incidents but only a Muslim woman who has grown up, educated, worked and spent her life in the UK is more able to answer such questions.

It can be said without a doubt that today, Muslim women in the UK, are flourishing with success. Over the years, there has been a reduction in the percentage of Muslims with no qualifications, and in some districts, Muslim women in full-time education exceed men. Times have changed, and there are more women in education and employment. In addition, traditional family pressures and attitudes towards women are also changing; more women are balancing work commitments and bringing up families at the same time, with both parents sharing equal responsibilities.

It is evident that women can practice and express their religion in the community and their place of work. They have a choice whether or not they want to cover their hair, women wearing the headscarf can be seen in all industries, such as government offices, retail outlets, commercial organisations, airports, law offices and the list goes on. Many Muslims feel free to practice their

faith in the UK and there are facilities available in some workplaces to perform their daily prayers. However, women do still face some challenges in the community from assumptions that they are forced to wear the headscarf. It is seen as a symbol of oppression and still carries this stigma until this day. Nevertheless, the UK government is always attempting to improve their policies, as Theresa May has made clear that her priority is to make Britain a country that works for everyone. On this International Women's day, Muslim women in the UK should be applauded for their great efforts and determination in balancing their successful careers and practising their religion freely. *"We cannot succeed when half of us are held back. We call upon our sisters around the world to be brave, to embrace the strength within themselves and realize their full potential."* says Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani Muslim girl who survived after Taliban tried to kill her just because she supported Muslim girls should have education.

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