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HOW DO MUSLIM MEN IN THE UK EMPLOY RELIGION AS A COPING METHOD WITH ISLAMOPHOBIA?

Birleşik Krallıktaki Müslüman Erkekler İslamofobi ile Başa Çıkma Yöntemi Olarak Dini Nasıl Kullanıyor?

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Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, Birleşik Krallık'ta İslamofobi ile başa çıkmanın bir yolu olarak dini inançlarını kullanan Müslüman erkeklerin deneyimlerini araştırmaktır. Ancak bu çalışmanın amacı Birleşik Krallıktaki Müslüman erkeklere ilişkin geniş kapsamlı sonuçlar çıkarmak değildir. Aksine, amaç Birleşik Krallık'ta ikamet eden Müslüman erkeklerin İslamofobi ile mücadelede dini inançlarını nasıl kullandıklarını kendi yaşadıkları deneyimlerden yola çıkarak kapsamlı bir şekilde incelemektir. Birleşik Krallık'ta Müslümanlar, kesişen kimlikleri nedeniyle pek çok zorlukla karşı karşıya kalmaktadır ve artan İslamofobi, önyargı ve ayrımcılık, hayatlarını daha da karmaşık hale getirmektedir. Din ve maneviyat, özellikle azınlık nüfuslar arasında zorlu koşullarla etkili bir başa çıkma mekanizması olarak sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır ve Birleşik Krallıktaki Müslüman erkekler, İslamofobi'nin etkileriyle başa çıkmak için dini inançlarını etkili bir şekilde kullanmaktadırlar. Nitel araştırma yöntemini benimseyen, Birleşik Krallık'ta yaşayan Müslüman erkeklerle yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine bireysel görüşmeler yapılan ve Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz (IPA) yöntemi uygulanan bu araştırmanın sonuçlarına göre; Birleşik Krallıktaki Müslüman erkekler, İslamofobi ile baş etmek için dini inançlarından çoğunlukla İslamofobik olayları Allah'ın bir imtihanı veya kader olarak görerek, Allah'a bırakarak, güçlü bir iman göstererek ve Allah'a dua ederek faydalanmaktadırlar. Dahası, Müslüman erkekler arasında İslamofobiye karşı bir başa çıkma mekanizması olarak dini inançların kullanılması, özellikle de Müslüman erkeklerin yanlarında bulunmadığı zamanlarda aile üyelerinin İslamofobik saldırılara maruz kaldığı durumlarda daha yaygın olarak kendini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, İslamofobi, Müslüman erkekler, başa çıkma mekanizması, Birleşik Krallık

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to investigate the experiences of Muslim males in the UK who employ their religious beliefs as a way of coping with Islamophobia. However, the objective of this study is not to draw broad conclusions regarding Muslim males in the UK. On the contrary, the aim is to conduct an extensive examination of the ways in which Muslim males residing in the UK use their religious convictions as a means of managing Islamophobia, drawing from their own lived experiences. Muslims in the UK encounter many challenges due to their intersecting identities, and the increasing level of Islamophobia, prejudice, and discrimination has further complicated their lives. Religion and spirituality are frequently employed as coping strategies to navigate challenging circumstances, especially among minority populations, and Muslim men in the UK effectively utilise their religious convictions to deal with the effects of Islamophobia. Adopting qualitative research methodology, employing semi-structured individual in-depth interviews with Muslim men in the UK, and applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the research findings revealed that Muslim males in the UK employ their religious beliefs to cope with Islamophobia, mostly by seeing Islamophobic occurrences as a divine test from Allah, known as Qadar, leaving the rest to Allah, demonstrating strong faith, and engaging in prayer to Allah. Moreover, the employing of religious beliefs as a coping mechanism against Islamophobia appears to be increasingly common among Muslim men, particularly when members of their family are subjected to Islamophobic attacks when Muslim men are not present.

Keywords: Psychology of Religion, Islamophobia, Muslim men, coping mechanism, the UK

INTRODUCTION

Western nations have a significant Muslim population, mostly residing in major European countries like the UK, Germany, France, and the United States for many decades. Despite the great contributions made by Muslims in the Western world in various areas such as the economy, labour market, academics, and sports, they face several challenges and problems due to their intersecting identities (Tariq - Syed, 2018). Muslims living in Western countries have faced persistent racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia for decades, mostly as a result of their ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Undoubtedly, racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia have a significant and detrimental influence on the lives of Muslims, leading them to experience anxiety, stress, and fear, and thus affecting their general psychological well-being (Samari, 2016).

Minority groups and Muslim individuals residing in Western nations have developed various coping strategies to effectively navigate the difficulties they encountered in their host societies, with the aim of maintaining their own well-being and that of their families. For instance, avoidance is one of the most popular coping mechanisms that Muslim communities in Western nations employ in order to deal with the issues that they face, such as racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia (Kunst et al., 2012). On the other hand, religious beliefs serve as an often employed coping mechanism by individuals in dealing with the issues and challenges they encounter in their daily lives (Pargament et al., 2017). Minority groups within the UK, specifically religious groups, frequently employ religious coping mechanisms to confront the challenges they face on a daily basis, despite the generally accepted perception of the UK as a highly secular and modern society (Alsaad, 2017). Although Muslims have developed various coping strategies to effectively navigate the difficulties they face, the main purpose of this article is to specifically investigate the ways in which Muslim males in the UK employ their religious beliefs as a means of coping with the difficulties they face, particularly Islamophobia, in order to maintain their lives in a secure way.

1. MUSLIMS IN THE UK

Despite the fact that Muslims have resided in Western nations for decades, the UK has been hosting them for centuries. Throughout British history, Muslims have held significant positions. Particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as the first half of the 20th century, a significant number of Muslim seamen, referred to as lascars, served in the British navy. Following World War II, many of these individuals chose to stay in the UK. (Runnymede Trust, 1997, 13). Following World War II, there was a significant surge of immigrants from Muslim nations to the UK, mostly driven by economic incentives, such as the need to earn money to support their families in their home countries. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, there was a significant increase in the Muslim community in the UK, resulting in their heightened visibility in the public sphere. This may be attributed to the high-quality education they received in the country. According to the latest census statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the population of people who self-identify as "Muslim" in the UK has risen from 2.7 million, accounting for 4.9% of the population in 2011, to 3.9 million, representing 6.5% of the population in 2021 (Religion, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics, 2022). The lives of Muslims in the UK, on the other hand, have become considerably more challenging as a result of the tremendous increase in prejudice, discrimination, and Islamophobia directed at Muslims in the last decades.

2. ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE UK

Muslims have been living in the UK for a considerable amount of time; nevertheless, it was not until certain pivotal events that their existence came to the attention of the public. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Satanic Verses affair in 1989, particularly the subsequent fatwa issued by Khomeini demanding the execution of author Salman Rushdie, caused a disturbing atmosphere in the UK. This led to increased concerns regarding Muslims residing in the UK. The terrorist attacks in Western countries, such as the World Trade Centre attacks in the USA on September 11, 2001, the Madrid train bombings on March 11, 2004, and the London bombings on July 7, 2005, instilled fear and raised security concerns among native people within the Western world and the UK. These events also contributed to the growth of xenophobia, as the initial fear transformed into

hatred and hostility towards immigrants, particularly those of Muslim descent. Consequently, there has been a significant surge in xenophobia, prejudice, and Islamophobia directed at Muslims residing in Western countries, including the UK (Allen, 2010).

Several recent occurrences in the UK over the past several years have had a significant influence in exacerbating Islamophobia in the country. For instance, Brexit seems to play a crucial role in increasing Islamophobia in the UK. Abbas (2020) posits that the whitewashing of diversity and multiculturalism and the promotion of ethnic nationalism via Brexit serve to reinforce the escalating influence of Islamophobia within British society. Following Brexit, there has been a persistent spread of fear and alarmist rhetoric regarding Muslims, as well as ongoing debates about British Muslims' sense of belonging (Tudor, 2023). These discussions have evolved into questions about Muslim loyalty, resulting in a significant increase in Islamophobic attacks against Muslims in Britain. This situation further impedes the efforts of Muslims to establish their identity and sense of belonging in the country (Uddin, 2023). The Palestinian crisis impacted the lives of Muslims in the UK, leading to an increase in Islamophobia in the country. For instance, Muslim doctors in the UK claim that expressing concern over the humanitarian situation in Gaza is subjecting them to unfair censorship. Muslim healthcare professionals who participated in a survey by the British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) reported encountering difficulties, including formal meetings with supervisors, disciplinary investigations, and referral to the General Medical Council, as a result of expressing their views on the Palestinian crisis in the workplace (BMJ, 2024). As a result, all of these developments have made Muslims more vulnerable to harm, resulting in a negative impact on their psychological well-being.

3. RELIGION AS A COPING METHOD

Although modernity, secularism, and urban life in contemporary societies have brought about significant changes in religious understandings and practices, such as a shift in focus away from the abstract, the spiritual, the personal, or the ethical principles in a religion (known as formalism), religion remains to have a significant influence on the lives of a large percentage of people (Baş, 2023). Many people typically mention their religious beliefs when discussing how they deal with very stressful situations. Religion has been highlighted as a means of coping more often than any other resource among some demographics, especially those dealing with life-threatening emergencies, minorities, and the elderly. Religious coping has been demonstrated to have a strong and distinct impact on many measures of adjustment, including stress-related growth, religious outcome, physical health, mental health, and emotional discomfort (Pargament et al., 2017). Numerous studies (King - Furrow, 2004; Muireann, 2011; Pargament et al., 2017) have shown that religion and spirituality are used as coping mechanisms in dealing with stressful situations. Furthermore, researchers have specifically highlighted the importance of religion and spirituality in managing life-threatening conditions such as cancer and HIV/AIDS (Breitbart et al., 2004; Cotton et al., 2006).

The use of religious coping may help people deal with a variety of distressing situations. When African Americans are confronted with a variety of challenging circumstances, such as health problems, poverty, or racism, they frequently indicate that prayer and other religious resources are the means by which they manage to deal with the pressures that they are experiencing (George et al., 2002). Regarding minority groups, Post and Weddington's (2000) research revealed that a significant number of participants identified racism as a primary cause of stress in the workplace, and this racism not only fostered a hostile environment but also heightened the need for individuals to demonstrate their competence. Participants indicated that they frequently employed faith and religion as coping mechanisms to effectively mitigate the impact of prejudice (Post – Weddington, 2000).

Archer's (2001) research revealed that the participants often emphasised the combination of their Muslim and masculine identities as a means of overcoming discrimination. This suggests that Islam offers them a robust and affirmative sense of self. Archer (2001) argues that individuals develop a deep attachment to religion as a means of dealing with racism. Loewenthal et al. (2011)

conducted research on the role of religious factors in coping with depression among different cultural-religious groups in the UK. The research included people who identified as Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, adherents of other religions, or non-religious. Within the realm of religious practices, faith and prayer were seen as the most beneficial. Muslims had a higher degree of conviction in the effectiveness of religious coping strategies for dealing with depression compared to other groups. Muslims were also more inclined to engage in religious coping behaviours, while being less inclined to seek social support or professional assistance for depression (Loewenthal et al., 2011). Kunst et al. (2012) suggest that religious stigma, such as perceived Islamophobia, negative portrayals in the media, and religious discrimination, significantly impedes Muslims' sense of belonging to their host countries in the Western world. Additionally, different types of religious stigma appear to create a sense of threat to Muslims' religious identity, and the participants appear to reinforce their religious identity when faced with a threat to it brought on by religious stigma (Kunst et al., 2012). However, this study attempts to investigate the strategies employed by Muslim males in response to Islamophobic attacks, specifically focusing on how they employ their religious beliefs to mitigate the adverse effects of Islamophobia, which is one of the genuine contributions of the study to the literature.

4. THE STUDY

This article presents specific findings from a study that investigates the challenges facing Muslim men in the UK. The main research study aims to explore the challenges faced by Muslim males in the UK and investigate their reactions, responses, and coping mechanisms in dealing with these issues. The study examines the difficulties faced by Muslim males in the UK, where there has been a notable increase in Islamophobia. This is carried out by utilising individual semi-structured and in-depth interviews as the chosen research methodology. The data included in this study is limited to information obtained only from interviews conducted with Muslim men in the UK, in accordance with the study's specified scope and objectives.

This phenomenological study uses qualitative research methods and adopts an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework to examine and gain an understanding of the challenges encountered by Muslim males living in the UK through an exploration of their personal experiences. Therefore, the participants were accessed employing purposive sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling, and were then interviewed individually using semi-structured and in-depth interview methods. This comprehensive study involved conducting 21 individual interviews with Muslim males in the UK. These participants were selected to represent three specific socio-cultural backgrounds: Algerian, Pakistani, and Somali. The selection of Pakistani, Somali, and Algerian Muslim males for interviews was determined by several factors. Pakistanis, Somalis, and Algerians have different geographical origins (Asian, East African, and North African, respectively), resulting in diverse cultural backgrounds, lifestyles, and degrees of social engagement. These variations significantly impact their experiences and the difficulties they encounter in the UK. Furthermore, the histories and experiences of Pakistanis, Algerians, and Somalis in the UK are notably different. Lastly, Pakistanis, Algerians, and Somalis in the UK belong to distinct social class categories.

All participants were all self-identified Muslims, aged 18 or older, presently living in the UK, and experienced challenges related to their Muslim identity. The interviews were conducted between February 12, 2019, and August 20, 2021, using a mix of in-person and online interviews. The participants currently reside in London and Birmingham but have previously lived in different regions across the UK, such as Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, Cardiff, Swansea, and others. The informed consent forms were completed by all the participants, and the conversations were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. On the basis of the narratives provided by the participants, this article provides an in-depth examination of the ways in which Muslim males employ their religious beliefs in order to cope with Islamophobia within their host nation, the UK.

5. LEAVE THE REST TO GOD (ALLAH)

In Islam, one of the six pillars of belief (Iman) is to "believe in Qadar (Divine Preordainment) that all which occurs of good and evil by Divine decree, accompanied by the employment of means to achieve desired results with satisfaction of what happens of good or bad, the sweet and the bitter, because it occurs by Allah's Decree" (bin Jamil Zeno, 1996, 17). "Al-Qadar" refers to the predetermined fate that Allah assigns to every individual creation, determined by His prior knowledge and guided by His Wisdom. The belief in this pillar entails acknowledging that all events, whether good or bad, occur solely in accordance with Allah's divine decree (Masjid ar-Rahmah, 2023). It would appear that the manifestation of this divine pillar may be observed in the lives of Muslim males in the UK when they cope with their challenges. These men face several problems in the UK, such as racism, discrimination, or Islamophobia, and as a way of coping with these challenges, they seem to attribute divine meanings to their experiences, such as seeing their challenges as a test of Allah.

Ahmad, a 37-year-old Pakistani man, was born and currently lives in London. He described an instance of encountering Islamophobia in the workplace, namely at an airport. A female security officer became suspicious of him when he was praying in the airport's designated prayer area. She approached him, accompanied by a dog and armed with a firearm, to conduct an inspection. According to Ahmed, despite his declaration of being an airport staff, he faced severe mistreatment due to his Islamic beard and clothing. Ahmad explained:

> I was quite traumatized, and felt very angry, because of the dog and the gun, … very angry. The lady suspected me due to my beard, my Islamic dressing. I did not do anything wrong. They (airport security staffs) have some authority. But Allah, has the biggest authority. … But you know, like people make mistakes, you know, everyone, Bibi Eve, Adam all made mistakes. We are all in the blood of Adam. So sometimes I make small mistakes and I ask Allah to forgive me. I ask Allah to turn this one into rewards as well. So when we say Dhikr (mentioning Allah), or like becoming Muslim for first time, or like when we do Hacc (Pilgrimage). So every time we say "La ilahe illallah" (There is no god but Allah), and "astaghfirullah" (O Allah forgive me). But this incident was very hard for me. But I said to the woman, because I told her that I wanted to report her, but I went back to the car park. I said to her, this is a test. A test from Allah. I told her," whatever you did, whatever you recently did, this for me is a blessing in disguise." I said to her, this is for me, it's a blessing because now I'm going to apply for teaching. I will be a teacher. After this incident I went to Istanbul and Konya (Turkey) for a spiritual retreat for one week. In my healing process in Konya, I felt like, some pain, like when somebody become Muslim, they have the same pain, but it was a kind of healing. I was not Muslim before but now I am Muslim. Alhamdulillah (Thanks to Allah) in the best place. Um, before I had all the material luxuries, but now I have no material luxuries. My family abandoned me, but my Islam is more important. So inshaallah, maybe they will join me soon. But if they do not, I will suffer. But Allah is with me, and the road is only for Allah (Ahmad, Pakistani, 37).

During the interview, Ahmad excessively focused on this particular incident and emphasised that it served as an important turning point in his life. According to him, this Islamophobic incident made him question himself and his religious life. He seems to ascribe a kind of divine meaning to this incident, and he sees it as a test from Allah. Although this Islamophobic attack made him very angry and traumatised, he seems to have coped with the incident, seeing it as a test of Allah in the first instance. Ahmad stated that he felt quite traumatised himself because of this Islamophobic attack he experienced; therefore, he quit the job and then made a journey for a spiritual retreat by visiting some historical religious places in Istanbul and Konya, in Turkey. During his post-trauma recovery, Ahmad appears to rely on religion as his primary coping technique to alleviate his emotional distress. Ahmad interestingly indicated that he abandoned his previous lifestyle, which encompassed material luxuries, and currently he lacks any material

pleasures. However, this resulted in him having some strained relations with his family, specifically his parents, and he once again resorted to his religious convictions as a coping mechanism. At the beginning of the interview, Ahmad portrayed himself and his family as belonging to a high social and economic class, exemplified by their ownership of multiple residences in London and their involvement in some small businesses. Following the Islamophobic attack he experienced at the workplace and his subsequent transformation in his religious beliefs, particularly in rejecting materialistic luxury, Ahmad found himself engaged in conflicts with his family, which he regarded as their abandonment of him. Ahmad seems to perceive a correlation between his abandoning material luxury and embracing his newfound religious life. Furthermore, he interprets his family's decision to abandon him as a result of his own decision to abandon material luxury, viewing it as a kind of test from Allah. Once again, he turns to his religious beliefs to navigate through this challenging circumstance. Ahmad seems to employ his religious beliefs successfully to cope with the Islamophobic attack he experienced first and then with the following challenges he faced.

Said, a 30-year-old Somali man, was born in the UK and works as a teacher. He shared one of his experience that he faced Islamophobia in his university years. He explained how he coped with the situation:

-How did you deal with the situation? What factors helped you to manage your stressful situation?

-Family, religion, I mean Islam. … We are, we are a strong family, and follow Islam, and we keep our family strong. You know, we are Muslim and if we truly follow Islam, Allah makes us strong, makes our family strong, makes our problems easier. We do everything we must do as a Muslim, we do our part and then we leave the rest to Allah (Said, Somali, 30).

Said drew attention to the profound connection that exists between family and religion, suggesting that both serve as effective coping mechanisms against Islamophobia. He asserts that adhering to Islam fosters the maintenance of a robust family unit, consequently establishing a strong support network to confront various obstacles and making the challenges easier for Muslims. Said articulated that a devout Muslim should diligently fulfil their responsibilities to the best of their abilities, and thereafter entrust the outcome to Allah. Said appears to regard his religious beliefs as a coping method in response to his obstacles, particularly Islamophobia.

6.   STRONG RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA

There was a significant amount of reference among the individuals who took part in the research on the importance of having strong religious beliefs, and the majority of the participants indicated that they feel religion to be highly essential in their everyday lives. Several participants argued that the lack of strong religious commitment among Muslim communities in the UK is a significant factor contributing to the issues faced by Muslims in the country. On the other hand, many attendees expressed that robust religious convictions could assist Muslim communities in the UK in effectively dealing with their difficulties and issues, such as racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia.

Hassan, a 33-year-old Somali man, has been living in the UK for 8 years. He works for a finance company and encountered Islamophobia while giving a friend a tour of a park in London. Hasan shared his experience that a drunk man verbally assaulted him and his friend, using Islamophobic remarks against them, such as labelling them as Muslim terrorists. Hassan expressed that the situation was unpleasant, and he had a sense of embarrassment considering it was his friend's first visit to the UK. Afterwards, he explained his method of coping with the incident:

-How did you overcome psychologically the negative effects of the Islamophobic attack you faced? What about the other victims of Islamophobia? How do you think they cope with Islamophobia?

-Faith.

-Faith. What do you mean? Can you explain more?

-Yeah. Yeah, the, the, the religion itself because we mostly, we believe this world is temporary anyway. So the same way we, we overcome problems with our lives, health, wealth, family, through God (Allah) and the same thing with Islamophobia. I used my faith, we (Muslims) should use faith to overcome Islamophobia, like patients' perseverance. If you have a strong immune system, you can defeat the disease, ... the disease cannot harm you, your body, if you have you have a strong immune system. ... It is the same with Islamophobia. It is your religion, your religious identity which is attacked (in Islamophobic incidents). But I think it depends where everybody is with their religion, ... the, the stronger with your religion, the less you are worried and concerned. You can overcome easily if you are strong with your faith because your faith gives you strength, enough strength to overcome, like a strong immune system. But the weaker with your religion, I think the more you are concerned, more worried, worried about your circumstances. Then it is very difficult, very hard to overcome. That will make you weaker anyway (Hassan, Somali, 33).

In his account, Hassan addressed the theological doctrine of Islam regarding the temporary character of the world and its events. This perspective seemed to strengthen his sense of patience towards the challenges he faces. When questioned about how he coped with the experience from a psychological standpoint, Hassan immediately responded with the word "faith." Subsequently, in his explanation Hassan made a thought-provoking analogy by drawing comparisons between Islamophobia and a disease and between strong religiosity and a robust immune system in the body. Throughout his narrative, Hassan successfully demonstrates his efficient utilisation of his religious beliefs to cope with the challenges that he faces in the UK, including the instance of being subjected to Islamophobic attitudes in the park.

On the other hand, Muslim males in the UK are deeply concerned about the safety of their families, particularly in relation to Islamophobia. Although they have not personally encountered Islamophobia, they possess an in-depth awareness of the growing prevalence of Islamophobia and have genuine concerns over the safety of their families. They appear to manage these concerns by utilising their religious convictions.

I cannot protect my family if I am not with them, so you know, it is very tricky, very hard. I cannot be always with them. I just pray for them all the time, I know, Allah is always with them. Allah will protect them, uh. Allah will protect us (Yasser, Algerian, 49).

Yasser, a 49-year-old Algerian man, has been living in the UK since 1995. Currently, he works as an Uber driver, and on a daily basis, he interacts with individuals from many backgrounds. Yasser shared his observation that there has been a significant surge in racism and Islamophobia in the UK, which has heightened his anxiety for his family's safety. During the interview, he usually prioritised discussing the safety of his family over his personal safety. This suggests that he perceives himself as capable of handling racism or Islamophobia as a reflection of his masculine identity. Yasser further remarked that while he is present with his family, no one would have the courage to approach them with racist or Islamophobic attitudes. Nevertheless, he is fully aware of the fact that he cannot constantly be in their presence. In this situation, he emphasised his belief that Allah would protect them. Yasser's account highlighted the heightened sensitivity of Muslim males in the UK over the safety of their families, particularly in relation to racism and Islamophobia. They seem to have a steadfast commitment to their beliefs, firmly believing that Allah will protect their families in the face of any racist or Islamophobic attacks.

Similarly, Khalil, a 45-year-old Algerian male, expressed that fulfilling his masculine duties in the UK sometimes is very challenging and makes him worried, and he has anxiety for his family's safety and well-being, particularly due to Islamophobia.

-Have you ever felt uncomfortable in the UK? Specifically when you fulfil your responsibilities as a Muslim man, as a father.

-Yeah, of course. It's quite, ... in Islam men have to look after family, as a father, as a man. And of course it is quite huge responsibility for me. I faced many challenges ... I am the only one who earns money in the family, ... the, the man is responsible for the money. Finding a job is very hard in this country, very hard, and you know, there is racism, there is Islamophobia, and this, racism and Islamophobia make finding a job very difficult. People have prejudice towards Muslims. They do not want to hire Muslims. I sometimes feel you know, you know, it is the hard times to bring money at home. However, Allah always gives to enough, to, to, how can I say, there is rizk (livelihood) to the people. It is for people. ... It is very stressful, sometimes, you know, living in the UK.

-So how do you manage your stress?

-I mean, only praying. Praying to Allah to, you know. ... It's, it's, it's a hard situation. I feel sometimes, ... if I, if I, if my family face such attack, such Islamophobic attack, what would I do? I cannot imagine right now, because I have a family, so for example, if someone attacked to my wife, I, I probably attack to them as well. Attack.

-But what if you are not there, if you are not with them when they are attacked?

-Oh, this is a really hard situation. I cannot imagine right now. I can only pray for them, pray to Allah to protect them, save them, ... I pray to Allah, inshaallah my family will not face a such situation (Khalil, Algerian, 45).

Khalil has been living in the UK since 1988 and shared several instances of the difficulties he encountered throughout his time there. Alongside the challenges in his school years in the UK, such as being mistreated by his teachers with some racist and Islamophobic sentiments, Khalil also mentioned the difficulties in his work and career. He detailed how long it took for him to receive a promotion at the company he worked at, despite being the best-qualified employee, just because of his Islamic identity. Furthermore, he mentioned that he had viewed numerous videos in which Islamophobic and racist sentiments were directed at Muslims, which increased his concern for the safety of his family. Khalil, despite his strong determination to safeguard his family in the event of an Islamophobic assault, hesitated when asked what he would do in his absence and described the situation as "a really hard situation." Then he explained that he would pray to Allah to protect his family. It appears that the strong religious beliefs held by Muslim men living in the UK function as a significant coping mechanism for them to address their anxieties and concerns stemming from the possibility that their families, when they (Muslim men) are not present, could be subjected to racist or Islamophobic attacks.

7.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

By utilising the conceptual framework of personal life experiences (phenomenology), this article presents the ways in which Muslim males living in the UK employ their beliefs about religion as a means for coping with their challenges, with a particular focus on Islamophobia. Religion has been recognised as an important way of dealing with stress, particularly among certain groups, such as minorities. Research has shown that religious coping may have a beneficial effect on stress-related issues and mental distress (Pargament et al., 2017). On the other hand, the utilisation of religious convictions among Muslim communities as a means of dealing with Islamophobia and its detrimental impacts is a significantly neglected area of study in academia. This article seeks to address this gap by examining how Muslim men in the UK effectively navigate Islamophobia through their reliance on religious commitments. The accounts of the participants discussed herein highlight the adverse impact of racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia on the lives of Muslim males. These experiences engender significant concern, distress, and anxiety over their own safety and the safety of their families. These findings suggest that the far-reaching, multi-dimensional effects of racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia deserve more

consideration than is typically given in discussions on how to promote social harmony and the inclusion of Muslim communities in the UK.

Research findings suggest that Muslim males successfully employ their religious beliefs to manage and overcome Islamophobia and its adverse consequences when they directly encounter Islamophobic attacks. This finding is consistent with Archer's (2001) study findings, which indicate that individuals form a profound emotional connection to religion as a strategy for coping with racism. This current research investigation revealed that Muslim males have a considerable inclination to use their religious convictions as a means of dealing with Islamophobia. Research participants in this study regard Islamophobia as an attack on Muslims' religious identity, and similar to what Kunst et al. (2012) contend, Muslim males actually tend to strengthen their religious identity in the face of Islamophobia.

The study's findings indicate that Muslim males in the UK perceive themselves as capable of protecting themselves and their families in the face of Islamophobic attacks. This perception may be interpreted as an expression of their masculine identities, particularly when they are in the presence of family members. On the other hand, when their family members encounter Islamophobic assaults and Muslim males are absent, they appear to cope with this distressing circumstance by relying on their religious beliefs, such as engaging in prayer to ask protection from Allah for their families. This would indicate that Islam more often serves as a coping mechanism for Muslim males when they are unable to control or act in situations where their families are attacked with Islamophobic sentiments in their absence.

The article attempts to address the existing gap in literature about the employing of religious beliefs by Muslim males in the UK to navigate the obstacles they face, particularly in relation to Islamophobia. Muslim males in the UK have challenges stemming from their religious identities, yet they utilise their religious beliefs as a means of coping with these challenges. Policymakers and social workers may get significant benefit from the findings of this research, as it may provide them with a comprehensive understanding of Muslim males in the UK. These findings could allow them to develop more targeted policies aimed at mitigating the detrimental effects of the growing Islamophobia in the country. The study has also some limitations. First, due to the timeframe of the interviews, which took place from February 12, 2019, to August 20, 2021, any recent nationwide or worldwide incidents were not taken into account. Secondly, the data was only gathered from three specific Muslim backgrounds in the UK, specifically Pakistani, Algerian, and Somali. As a result, the findings of the study cannot be generalised to the broader British Muslim communities.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bu makalenin amacı, Birleşik Krallık'ta İslamofobi ile başa çıkmanın bir yolu olarak dini inançlarını kullanan Müslüman erkeklerin deneyimlerini araştırmaktır. Batı dünyasındaki Müslümanlar ekonomi, işgücü, akademi ve spor gibi çeşitli alanlarda yaptıkları büyük katkılara rağmen, kesişen kimlikleri nedeniyle birçok zorluk ve sorunla karşı karşıya kalmaktadırlar (Tariq - Syed, 2018). Batılı ülkelerde yaşayan Müslümanlar, çoğunlukla etnik, dini ve kültürel kökenleri nedeniyle onlarca yıldır sürekli ırkçılık, ayrımcılık ve İslamofobi ile karşı karşıya kalmaktadırlar. Şüphesiz ırkçılık, ayrımcılık ve İslamofobi'nin Müslümanların hayatları üzerinde önemli ve zararlı etkileri vardır ve onların kaygı, stres ve korku yaşamalarına neden olmakta ve dolayısıyla genel psikolojik sağlıklarını etkilemektedir (Samari, 2016). Yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısı boyunca Birleşik Krallıktaki Müslüman nüfusunda önemli bir artış olmuştur ve bu artış onların kamusal alanda görünürlüğünün artmasına neden olmuştur. Ulusal İstatistik Ofisi'nin (ONS) son nüfus sayımı istatistiklerine göre, Birleşik Krallık'ta kendini "Müslüman" olarak tanımlayan kişilerin nüfusu 2011 yılında 2,7 milyon (nüfusun %4,9'u) iken 2021 yılında 3,9 milyona (nüfusun %6,5'i) yükselmiştir (Din, İngiltere ve Galler - Ulusal İstatistik Ofisi, 2022). Bu artışa rağmen Birleşik Krallık'ta Müslümanların yaşamı ise, son yıllarda Müslümanlara yönelik önyargıların, ayrımcılığın ve İslamofobi'nin artmasıyla birlikte daha da zorlu hale gelmiştir. Din, insanların büyük bir çoğunluğunun yaşamı üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olmaya devam etmektedir (Baş, 2023). Pek çok kişi, çok stresli durumlarla nasıl başa çıktıklarını tartışırken genellikle dini inançlarından bahsetmektedirler. Farklı dini damgalama türlerinin Müslümanların dini kimliğine yönelik bir tehdit duygusu yarattığı ve Müslümanların dini damgalanmanın getirdiği bir tehditle karşılaştıklarında dini kimliklerini güçlendirdikleri görülmektedir (Kunst vd., 2012). Bu fenomenolojik çalışma, Birleşik Krallık'ta yaşayan Müslüman erkeklerin kişisel deneyimlerini araştırarak karşılaştıkları zorlukları incelemek ve anlamak için nitel araştırma yöntemlerini kullanmaktadır ve Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz (IPA) anlayışını benimsemektedir. Katılımcılar tarafından sunulan anlatılara dayanarak bu makale, Müslüman erkeklerin Birleşik Krallık'ta İslamofobi ile başa çıkmak için dini inançlarını nasıl kullandıklarına dair derinlemesine bir inceleme sunmaktadır. Araştırma bulguları, Müslüman erkeklerin, İslamofobik saldırılarla doğrudan karşılaştıklarında İslamofobi'yi ve bunun olumsuz sonuçlarını yönetmek ve üstesinden gelmek için dini inançlarını başarılı bir şekilde kullandıklarını göstermektedir. Bu bulgu, Archer'ın (2001) bireylerin ırkçılıkla başa çıkma stratejisi olarak din ile derin bir duygusal bağ kurduklarını gösteren çalışma bulgularıyla tutarlıdır. Bu mevcut araştırma, Müslüman erkeklerin İslamofobi ile mücadelede dini inançlarını kullanma yönünde önemli bir eğilime sahip olduklarını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu çalışmaya katılan araştırma katılımcıları, İslamofobi'yi Müslümanların dini kimliğine yönelik bir saldırı olarak görmektedir ve Müslüman erkeklerin aslında İslamofobi karşısında dini kimliklerini güçlendirme eğiliminde oldukları görülmüştür. Araştırmanın bulguları, Birleşik Krallıktaki Müslüman erkeklerin kendilerini İslamofobik saldırılar karşısı kendilerini ve ailelerini koruyabilecek kapasitede algıladıklarını göstermektedir. Bu algı, özellikle aile üyelerinin yanındayken maskülen kimliklerinin bir ifadesi olarak yorumlanabilir. Öte yandan, aile üyeleri İslamofobik saldırılarla karşılaştığında ve Müslüman erkekler ailelerinin yanında olmadığında, bu sıkıntılı durumla, Allah'tan ailelerini korumasını istemek için dua etmek gibi dini inançlarına sarılarak baş ettikleri görülmektedir. Bu durum da dinin (İslam'ın) Birleşik Krallık'ta yaşayan Müslüman erkekler için, ailelerinin İslamofobik saldırıya uğradığı ve Müslüman erkeklerin durumu kontrol edemedikleri veya harekete geçemedikleri zamanlarda, daha güçlü bir başa çıkma mekanizması olarak hizmet ettiğini göstermektedir. Makale, Birleşik Krallık'ta Müslüman erkeklerin özellikle İslamofobi ile ilgili olarak karşılaştıkları zorlukları aşmak için dini inançlarını kullanmalarına ilişkin literatürdeki boşluğu gidermeye çalışmaktadır. Birleşik Krallıktaki Müslüman erkekler dini kimliklerinden kaynaklanan zorluklarla karşılaşmakta, ancak bu zorluklarla baş etme aracı olarak dini inançlarını başarılı bir şekilde kullanmaktadırlar. Politika yapıcılar ve sosyal hizmet uzmanları, Birleşik Krallıktaki Müslüman erkeklere ilişkin kapsamlı bir anlayış sunabileceği için bu araştırmanın bulgularından önemli ölçüde faydalanabilirler. Bu bulgular, ülkede büyüyen İslamofobi'nin zararlı etkilerini hafifletmeyi amaçlayan, daha hedefe yönelik politikalar geliştirmelerine olanak sağlayabilir.