

CCMW Conference
Presentation

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Introduction

1. Purpose of the project:
 - a. To provide an opportunity for Muslim women to give voice to their own experiences and concerns
 - b. To increase awareness of the impact on the lives of Muslim Women
 - c. To develop concrete, practical recommendations directly from the community based research

2. Methodology
 - a. 160 women were consulted in 8 Canadian cities from February to June 2002
 - b. Each focus group discussed a set of 20 questions which were developed by CCMW board
 - c. The final results of the research take the form of a report which is available here

3. Partner Organizations
 - a. AWO, CMCC, SOYAT, CAF

Results

- I believe these results are significant since, it gives foundation and validity to the concerns of Muslim women. We are often painted as a group that lodges complaints without any justification to them. This research allows us to meet the mainstream community on their terms

 - **Will discuss three things: Emotions of significance, positive effects of 9/11 and media choices and conclude with next steps/future action**

 - Throughout the focus groups, I felt as if the women had a need to have their emotions justified. A common comment was, «I am so afraid but I don't know why».
1. Emotions of Significance
What issues plagued the Muslim community, and which of these were justified?
There are many, I will only deal with two: FEAR and MISREPRESENTATION

- a. **Fear:** Fear that the perpetrators were Muslim, disinclined to leaving their homes for fear of backlash, feared the effect of 9/11 on their countries of origin
 - i. Internment of Japanese Canadians during WW2; it was an attack on American soil that affected Japanese Canadians
 - ii. Data compiled by CAIR-Can and the Toronto Police show that hate activity against Muslims and people of South Asian decent increased as a direct result of 9/11
 - iii. In this study, 25% of participants reported cases of hate-activity, only two of which were reported to police. These activities ranged from phone calls and name-calling to more serious crimes of vandalism and physical assault
 - b. **Misrepresentation:** Throughout the events of 9/11, Muslims were depicted as being pleased with the attacks. This depiction of Muslims lead directly to feelings of alienation within the Muslim community
 - i. According to this study, almost all participants expressed sentiments of shock, sympathy and deep sorrow.
 - ii. The feeling of alienation was exacerbated by political events, such as President Bush's national address that effectively created two camps, good versus evil, us versus them
2. Positive effects of 9/11
- a. The Kindness of Canadians
 - b. Mobilizing force, Muslims becoming proactive
 - c. Opportunity to dispel some myths about Islam
 - d. The face of moderate Islam is being seen
 - e. Greater understanding of Afghanistan and the forces at play in the region
3. Media Choices
- a. 20% of participants said that the internet, both websites and list-servs, were their main source of information.
 - b. Many participants had responded to the media in some way: wrote letters to their political representative, letters to local newspapers and television stations. Those that did not respond to the media cited laziness as their reasoning, however some felt that the media would inevitably misrepresent them so it was best not to complain.

Next steps

- 1. Now that we have this, what are we going to do with it?
 - a. Report has been translated into French
 - b. Each focus group coordinator has been sent a copy of the report along with a list of participants as well as all partner organizations and those who have expressed interest

- c. Press release was sent to all major newspapers, radio and television stations
- d. Have been interviewed by the Gazette and the CBC

Participant Recommendations

1. Post 9/11 Personal Impact

- a. Education at home
 - Encourage discussion of world events at home
 - Encourage children to be proud of their Muslim identity
 - Encourage children to learn more about Islamic History
- b. Career Diversity
 - Encourage young Muslims to follow non-traditional career paths, become politicians, journalists, lawyers, public servants. This will allow a Muslim voice at a variety of levels.
- c. Individual Involvement
 - Encourage more people to become involved in local organizations

2. Impact of 9/11 on Canadian Communities

- a. Muslim Representation
 - Some respondents felt that it was important to have one voice that represents the Muslim community whereas others felt it was more important to have a myriad of speakers that accurately represents the diversity in the Muslim community.
- b. Skills Needed
 - There are some skills that the Muslim community lacks. An educational seminar should be put in place that teaches community groups how to organize effectively, how to lobby the government, how to agree to disagree, writing letters of support and concern to MP's and the media, how to disseminate information efficiently, how to be more approachable.
- c. Non- Muslim Community
 - Encourage networking outside the Muslim community
 - Encourage more Muslims to become involved in community activities, reach out to other communities that have the same concern for social justice issues

- d. Increased Knowledge of Islam and Islamic Practises
- There is a general lack of awareness of Islam within the Muslim and mainstream communities. Increase the level of debate within the community. More discussions about Islam that are not related to 'hot issues' like hijab and terrorism
 - Disseminate accurate information to mainstream community about Islam that also attempts to dispel prevailing myths and misconceptions
- e. Cohesion Within
- The Muslim community has always been plagued by disunity. In order to demonstrate a united front, the community should create an umbrella organization of all Muslim groups.
 - Strengthen already existing organizations like CCMW, FMW, AWO by supporting them financially or in kind
 - Encourage individuals to make recommendations to organizations
- f. Public Sector
- School System
- It is imperative that school boards receive information about Islam. Have community groups go into schools and talk about Islam. Also provide schools with resources: information packages for teachers, books for library
- Government
- Encourage Muslim community to be more politically active
 - Encourage Muslim community to be proactive by creating a Muslim lobby group
- g. Youth Involvement
- Encourage the youth to become more involved in their community by having more youth chapters of organizations or include the youth in regular projects.
- h. Religious Institutions
- Encourage mosques to be more approachable by having more open houses at mosques or community events where the larger Canadian community is welcome
 - Encourage public discourse about Islam in the mosques
- i. Role of Women
- Women need to raise their profile; encourage women to be more active. More organizations should be in place to increase the role women play in the community, a place where women can explore internal issues

j. Increase Participation

More volunteers

- Must widen the network of volunteers; get more people involved; the resources of regular volunteers have been tapped out, few people doing the work of many.

Government funding

- Have government funded paid positions in order to increase participation

3. Role of the Media

a. Education

- The mainstream media must change its coverage. The media needs to be more aware of Islam the religion
- Provide the media with contact names of Muslim organizations and community leaders who can best fulfill the needs of the media

b. Support Media Advocacy Groups

- Groups such as CAIR and CIC are doing great work; we should support these groups financially or in kind

c. Alternative Media

- Encourage the community to put together their own newspaper or newsletter
- Encourage the Canadian community to get news from alternative media sources (Internet, satellite television, specific programs)