Social Discord and Second-class Citizenship

A Study of the Impact of Bill 21 on Québec Muslim Women in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Executive Summary

About the Study

Question: What was the impact of Bill 21 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic on Muslim women's employment experiences in Québec?

411
Quebec Muslim women surveyed

750
General population of Quebec surveryed

10
Quebec visibly Muslim women interviewed

1,016
Minutes of interview

86,743
Words of transcibed interview data

Findings

#1. Social Discord and Second-class Citizenship

Muslim women are facing more hostile work environments, more discriminatory workplace practices, and are disadvantaged and ostracized in multiple ways in a climate of increasing social discord.

> **"Bill 21 has clearly made people uninhibited abour their racist views"**

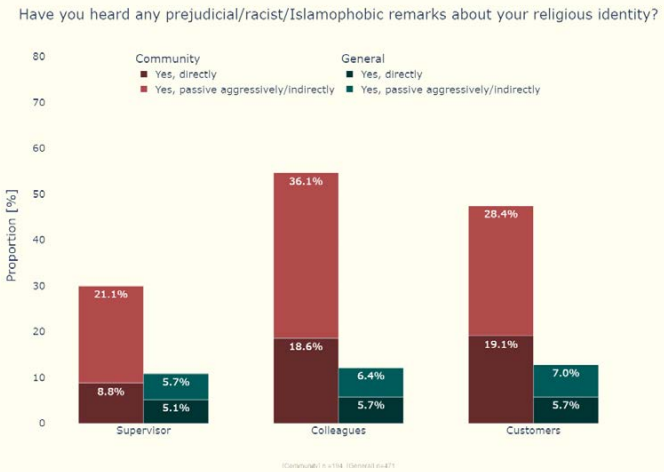
54%

of Muslim women have heard racist or prejudicial remarks about their religious identity from their colleagues at work (vs. 9% of the general population)

39%

of Muslim women have faced microaggressions at work

1 in 5 Muslim women have experienced physical threats or aggression at work



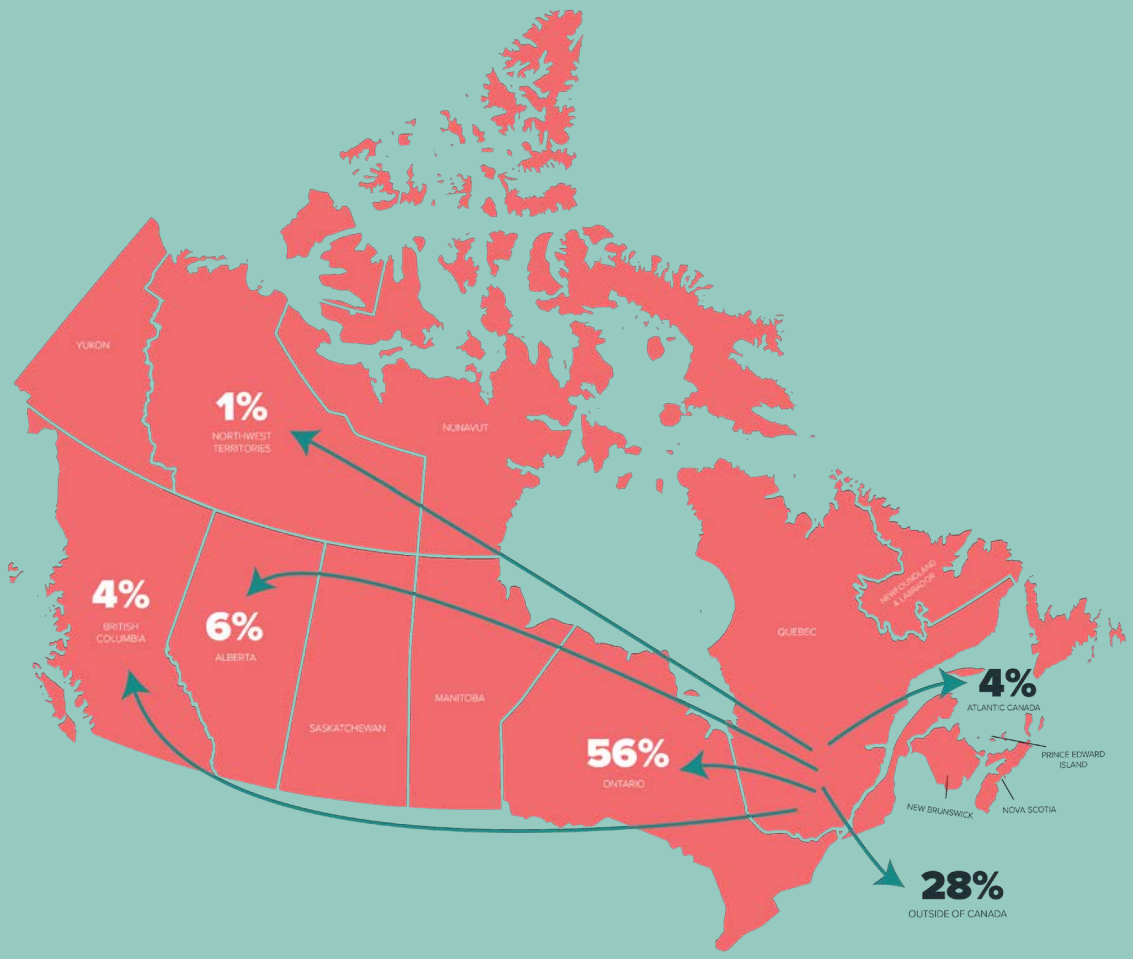
73%

of the women we surveyed felt that Bill 21 impacted their job search experience (vs. 8% of general population)

66%

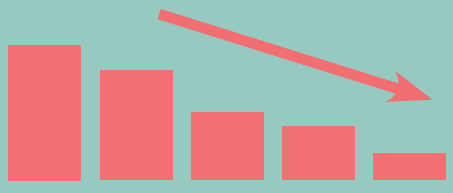
of Muslim women have applied or are considering applying for work within Muslim communities as a result of Bill 21 (Muslim-owned businesses, community organizations etc.) leading to concerns around the ghettoization of Muslim communities.

#2. Muslim Emigration from Québec



$3.2 Billion+

in estimated lost income for the province



“A climate of tension”

An alarmingly high number of Muslim women (including employed and unemployed) are considering or are planning to leave the province. Most of these women are from francophone communities.

71%

of Muslim women have considered leaving the province.

73%

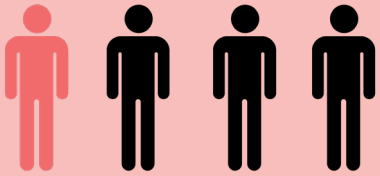
of Muslim women have applied or are considering applying for work outside of Québec

#3. COVID-19 Impact

> **“Yes, it’s sad to say, but it took a global pandemic to breathe a little.”**

COVID-19 measures such as lockdowns and masking brought a sense of respite from everyday experiences of hate and discrimination, raising concerns about the transition back to working in person.

1 in 4 Muslim women found it easier to look for or to do their jobs while COVID-19 measures were in place.



#4. Declining Mental Well-being

> **“Before Bill 21, I had the freedom to dream like my colleagues.”**

Since Bill 21 became law, Muslim women in Québec report feeling a loss of a sense of belonging, alongside high levels of alienation and a bleak future outlook. Muslim women are also trying to go about their everyday lives in a social and political climate where they feel they are marked as targets because of Bill 21.

73%
expressed concern about the future

64%
feel mistrust towards the government

54%
report feeling stressed

39%
expressed a sense of hopelessness

64%
indicated that Bill 21 adversely affected their well-being

This project has been funded by Women and Gender Equality Canda

Women and Gender Equality Canada
Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada

Canada

List of Recommendations

This study makes 11 recommendations to ameliorate the impact of Bill 21 and the COVID-19 pandemic on Québec Muslim women. Foremost of these recommendations are:

	Department	Recommendation
1	**Department of Justice (federal)**	We urge the federal government to keep its promise of intervening in the legal challenge against Bill 21. We further recommend that the Department of Justice challenge the use of the notwithstanding clause to create second-class citizenship, and to prevent the legalization of violations of the human rights of racial and religious minorities by governments by convening a constitutional conference.
2	**Government of Québec**	While we are aware that the government of Québec led by Premier Legault has entrenched its position on maintaining second-class citizenship through upholding Bill 21, we draw attention to the fact that the simplest solution to the challenges raised in this report is that the Government of Québec repeal Bill 21 immediately.
3	**Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)**	We recommend that ESDC create a pilot employment insurance program for trained professionals who are unable to work in their professions because of Bill 21.
4	**Employment and Social Development Canada**	Given the experiences of career derailment for Muslim women due to Bill 21, we recommend that ESDC offer re-training subsidies for those who are forced to change their career paths for as long as Bill 21 remains law.
5	**Department of Canadian Heritage**	Dedicate anti-racism capacity building funds for community-based organizations and hotlines that support Muslim women's employment and provide legal supports for employment discrimination.
6	**Employment and Social Development Canada (federal) and CNESST (Québec)**	Invest in trainings of workplace safety, harassment, violence, and human rights in key employment sectors in Québec to mitigate the impacts of return to work in person as COVID-19 measures are lifted in workplaces. These should include reminders of employer responsibilities and suggestions for policy changes within workplaces to strengthen protections and deterrents.
7	**Women and Gender Equality Canada**	Invest in anti-Islamophobia trainings focusing on gendered Islamophobia in strategic employment sectors in Québec.
8	**Women and Gender Equality Canada**	Further collection of disaggregated data to study Muslim women's intersectional experiences of workplace discrimination and violence in targeted sectors (healthcare, education, retail, private).
9	**Department of Health (federal)**	Allocate funding for culturally responsive mental health care and resources for Muslim women in partnership with Muslim community organizations in Québec (e.g. mosques, student groups, women's organizations, community centres) to create resources for support and spaces of healing
10	**Québec Municipalities**	Engage in anti-Islamophobia public education campaigns including investing in arts and culture programs with a focus on Muslim women and gendered Islamophobia.
11	**Department of Canadian Heritage**	Establish a dedicated stream of funding focused on bilingual media productions about Muslim communities and Islamophobia within the Canada Media Fund.

Acknowledgements

This study was made possible with the support of a grant from Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE). We are grateful for the support of WAGE throughout this project.

We would like to also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of many who supported the project, including our field research team Yasser Lahlou, Amine Boulajoul and Selsabil Hamiham, and our dedicated volunteers Kamilla Saadi, Doha Zrouki, Samia El Fene, Sufian Alam, Jasmine Alam, Zineb Hamiham and Larbi Abdelli. Several community organizations provided critical support in raising awareness of the issues and recruiting participants for this study. We are grateful for the time they took to support this project.

We are also grateful for the contributions of the team at Abacus Data who supported the survey component of this study and offered critical guidance on data gathering and analysis. This project benefitted from the wisdom and insights of our advisory committee members: Dr. Natasha Bakht (University of Ottawa), Dr. Amelie Barras (York University), and Zeinab Diab (Université de Montréal), whose scholarly expertise and experiences greatly enriched the study at every step. We would also like to thank mental health experts Sinthusha Panchalingam (CMHA) and Dr. Siham Elkassem (King's University College) who reviewed sections of the study. This project received critical support in proofreading and graphic design from Steven Zhou and Ishmam Sarker from the communications team at NCCM.

This study would not have been possible without the participation of the Québec Muslim women who shared their stories with courage and generosity. We thank all eleven of our interview participants and each and every one of the 411 women who completed our survey. We hope that this study helps shed light on your lived experiences and brings about changes to ameliorate the difficulties you face.

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National Council of Canadian Muslims

The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) is a civil liberties and human rights organization with offices in Québec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Nova Scotia. NCCM focuses on building mutual understanding, combatting hate and discrimination, and eradicating Islamophobia in Canada. Working alongside allies and community partners, our work focuses on ensuring that all Canadians have full access to their rights and freedoms regardless of their race or religion.

Established in 2000 in Montréal, NCCM accomplishes this mandate through political advocacy, education, legal action, and media representation. Our work has helped thousands of Canadians across the country gain access to justice, find pathways to civic engagement, and organize local movements for change.

NCCM has been at the forefront of fighting for Muslim women's rights in Québec through challenges to laws like Bill 62, Bill 21 and the Charter of Québec Values, and speaking out about Islamophobia and hate.

Introduction

On June 16, 2019, Bill 21, "An Act respecting the laicity of the State," was passed in the Québec legislature.[1] This legislation prohibits those who wear religious symbols such as the hijab, kippah or turban from being employed in several public sector jobs. The Act and its impact have not gone unchallenged: Several organizations and individuals, including the NCCM, have filed legal challenges questioning the constitutionality of the law; Québecers have taken to the streets on numerous occasions to protest the Act; impacted individuals have bravely spoken out; and many academic and media commentators have criticized the law for its troubling effects.

This study emerged out of the experiences of Québec Muslim women who reached out to NCCM, requesting support after experiencing a range of adverse impacts after the passage of Bill 21. Some of these incidents were related to workplaces such as public schools, or from students who were aspiring to become teachers, police officers or prosecutors – that is, public sector jobs that are directly implicated within the Act. However, many of the incidents reported, while related to Bill 21, were well outside of the scope of the law. For instance, one woman who was working in the retail sector was told by a customer to "take that thing" off her head because Bill 21 is now law. Another woman who wore a hijab was asked by her employer in the healthcare sector to remove it to continue working. While reports of these incidents were received in an ad hoc way, they raised concerns that there was a broader pattern of hostility, discrimination and hate that was not in the technical scope of the law, but was nonetheless causing considerable harm to the everyday lives of Muslim women in Québec. Shortly after the passage of the bill, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic measures raised further questions about how Québec Muslim women were being simultaneously impacted by both the Bill 21 and the pandemic.

NCCM held a number of consultations with Québec mosques, Muslim community organizations, and student groups in light of this large spike in incidents. Community members were clear that a robust study was needed to get a clearer picture of the new everyday realities for Québec Muslim women, in order to make grounded recommendations for change.

This study contributes to the growing chorus of nearly unanimous findings thus far from the research community, when it comes to the harms caused by Bill 21. In particular, our study contributes unique insights into the impact of the passage of Bill 21 on the employability of Québec Muslim women as well as their experiences in various stages of employment. We also looked specifically at how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped these experiences. The study employed a mixed-methods approach using qualitative interviews with ten Muslim women in Québec, survey data from 411 Muslim women in Québec who are currently employed or in the job market, and 750 members of the general population in Québec for comparative purposes. The findings of this study make clear that harmful impacts of the law are being felt by Québec Muslim women, at a greater rate than the general population, within and beyond the direct

scope of the Act. Muslim women in Québec who participated in this study report that since Bill 21 became law, they are facing:

- **Increased levels of hostility at their workplaces;**
- **Discriminatory treatment during job searches;**
- **A severe decline in their sense of belonging; and**
- **Negative impacts on their mental health.**

Notably, these impacts on Muslim women in Québec have been experienced at a significantly higher rate than what we found in our general population survey of Québecers. Contrary to the Québec government's assertions that the Act is narrow in scope, our study found that these impacts are being felt within employment sectors directly in the scope of the law, such as public education, as well as in employment sectors that are not within the scope of the law, such as healthcare or banking. While the Muslim women in this study experienced negative impacts at a higher rate than the general population, visibly Muslim women who wear a hijab experienced these impacts at an even higher rate.

In line with other studies[2] of the racialized impacts of COVID-19 measures, the Muslim women who participated in this study also found a sense of respite brought about by a reduction in their visibility in public spaces and workplaces as a result of the temporary shifts to remote work during the lockdowns, and a sense of blending in with the general population as more and more people became accustomed to covering and seeing others covered with masks.

Overall, our findings confirm what Québec Muslim communities and allies have been asserting about Bill 21 i.e. that it relegates Muslim women to second-class citizens in Québec and leads to social disharmony – and Muslim women are acutely aware of this new reality. As prospects for their livelihood narrow in Québec, our study found that a disproportionately high number of Muslim women are leaving or are considering leaving the province altogether, raising concerns about the potential economic impacts on the province. Many are also turning inwards to search for employment within Muslim-run businesses or community organizations. While many Muslim women reported engaging in various acts of resistance and survival – from organizing within their workplaces, to participating in protests, to modifying their hijab styles, to smiling more – many also indicated being exhausted by this battle and the pressures of representation.

This study is organized into eight sections:

i. **Methodology:** The first section explains our mixed methods approach in detail, including the design of the qualitative interviews, the survey design, outreach strategy, and the demographics included in the data.

ii. **Background:** The second section provides brief historical and political context related to the passage of Bill 21 and COVID-19 measures, as well as canvassing recent studies on the impacts of Bill 21 to provide a short literature review of how this study is located within a growing body of research on the topic.

iii. **Job search experiences:** The third section dives into the first set of findings gleaned from the qualitative and survey data we collected related to Muslim women's experiences as they searched for jobs since the passage of the law. This section includes their experiences with job interviews, rejections, and use of employment services.

iv. **Experiences at work:** The fourth section examines a range of experiences in workplaces including, Islamophobic/racist remarks about religious identity, physical threats and aggression, overall changes to work environments and incomes.

v. **COVID-19 Impact:** This section provides an analysis of findings related to the impact of the pandemic on Muslim women's employment experiences.

vi. **Mental health:** The sixth section of this report takes a closer look at the impact on the mental health of Muslim women including on their future outlook, a growing mistrust and paranoia about the government and institutions, a general sense of fear for personal safety, the pressure of representation and an overall feeling of exhaustion.

vii. **Strategies of survival and resistance:** This section explores how our respondents felt about Québec as a place to live and work, their desire to leave or turn inward in their respective communities, and their strategies to cope and resist.

viii. **Recommendations:** Based on the findings of this study, we make 11 recommendations aimed at ameliorating the impact of Bill 21 and the COVID-19 pandemic on Muslim women in Québec.

I. Methodology

This study is designed as a community-based project where community members have been involved throughout the research process, from inception, to design, to data collection, to review, and dissemination. We employed a mixed-methods approach to data collection using surveys completed by 411 Muslim women in Québec. In addition, we surveyed 750 members of the general population in Québec for comparative purposes. All of the participants included in the study were either currently employed or had been employed or in search of employment between June 2019 and when they completed the survey.

Semi-structured Interviews

Participants in the semi-structured interviews completed a short form for demographic information and then verbally answered open-ended interview questions related to employment status, experiences in search of employment, experiences in workplaces, and impact on livelihoods, lifestyle, and mental health. The questions were designed based on multiple reports NCCM received from women who faced discrimination, hate, or other kinds of hostility in relation to their work life.

The interviews were conducted in English or French or both. Participation was voluntary and recorded, focusing on personal experiences and opinions, lasting up to 2 hours. Participants were given the option to withdraw at any time without consequences, ensuring confidentiality and privacy. They received a $100 honorarium for their time.

Out of the 10 interviews conducted, three were conducted in French only, three were bilingual (English and French), and four were conducted in English only. Six interviewees lived in Montréal or the greater Montréal area, one in Gatineau, two in Québec City, and one in Vaudreuil-Dorion. Six of the women were employed, two were self-employed, and two were unemployed or underemployed. Of the 10 women, five were employed or looking for employment in the education sector, and two in healthcare. The remainder were in retail, banking, and government services.

The recruitment process started in November 2022 and the interviews took place over seven weeks. Participants were recruited from community organization networks as well as the snowball method. It is important to note that there were two recurring factors of concern for prospective participants: confidentiality and not seeing the purpose or utility of this study. In the case of the former, participants were afraid of reprisals at their places of work and their personal safety. As for the latter, some participants expressed having lost hope in any real change regarding Bill 21 and its effects, thus deterring them from recounting and sharing their experiences. This sense of fear, futility and fatigue in the context of nearly five years of living under Bill 21 is not surprising.

To address these concerns, we reviewed our confidentiality protocols with prospective participants to address their worries and provided them with some considerations about the power

of sharing their experiences and telling their stories. We were, in total, able to recruit 11 participants. However, one participant chose to withdraw from the research after the interview was conducted for fear of reprisal from her employer for speaking out about the discrimination she had faced.

Six out of the ten interviews were conducted in person. Two were in a coffee shop, one in a mosque and three were at the participant's domicile. The others were online. Apart from the coffee shop setting, the researcher was always alone with the participant, which allowed for more in-depth discussions. Indeed, even online participants would be in closed rooms in their homes. Once the interview recording started, most participants would be hesitant to share, but as the conversation progressed, they would delve into more details about their experiences. While we had planned for interviews to last approximately one hour, most interviews lasted close to two hours. These interviews became a safe space for participants to share anything they wanted about their experiences, their thoughts and their opinions regarding Bill 21 and the COVID-19 pandemic, testifying to how much participants had to say on the situation.

In total, we conducted **1,016** minutes of interviews, resulting in **86,743** words of transcribed interview data.

Surveys

The surveys were administered with the assistance of Abacus Data, a market and public opinion research agency. The survey questions were based on the qualitative phase of the study and were designed to gather data on the demographics, employment experience and changes in employment since June 2019. In addition, the survey included a series of questions on the impact of law 21 on job searches, work environments and mental health. The survey also included questions on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on experiences in employment.

For demographics and employment status, the survey included close-ended questions with data entry validation mechanisms to ensure the validity of the data. The survey also used a variety of multiple-choice questions and interval scale questions to assess the degree of impact of certain factors on employment and job loss. The survey also employed conditional question flow for questions that are only relevant if a previous answer was given. The community survey also validated the postal code, religion and gender questions, to make sure that all participants are Muslim women living in the province of Québec.

Participant recruitment

In order to find the target population, the research team used a three-pronged recruitment strategy including:

1. **Survey panels by Abacus Data;**
2. **Digital promotion online; and**
3. **Field research conducted in-person.**

The panel surveys by Abacus Data drew on an existing pool of survey participants in Québec, narrowed down to those who identified as Muslim women. Digital promotion and online recruitment by NCCM took the form of a call for participants on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. The survey was also promoted on email lists and group chats of several community organizations and academic institutions in Québec. Interested participants were asked to fill out a form with their personal information to be contacted later by the research team. Before collecting the data from a participant who was recruited online, an initial screening was performed by the research team either by phone or in-person, to ensure that the participants are part of the target group (Muslim women living in Québec). The survey was administered via a web link shared with the participant by email or via QR code only made accessible after the initial screening.

Figure 2: Image of the Poster used to promote the study.

Our in-person recruitment strategy included outreach with over 20 different organizations, such as mosques, womens centres, student associations, Muslim organizations around the Island of Montréal, Laval, Larger Montréal Region, Capitale-Nationale regions, and Gatineau. The research team set up survey kiosks in various community events where the target population was expected to be present (such as festivals, religious gatherings, social events, etc.).

A survey incentive of $25 was promoted to encourage participation from the target group.

The general population survey participant recruitment was executed by Abacus Data using existing panels, narrowed down to Québecers.

Demographics of survey respondents

In total 423 participants filled the community survey from which all 423 (100%) are Muslim women living in Québec. 294 participants (71.5%) were visibly Muslim (i.e. they wore a hijab, niqab or other indicator of Muslim identity) and 117 participants (28.5%) were not visibly Muslim. Among them, 12 participants were below the target age, and hence were removed from the survey analysis. In comparison, 750 participants from Québec answered the general population survey among which 385 (51.3%) were women and 365 (48.7%) were male.

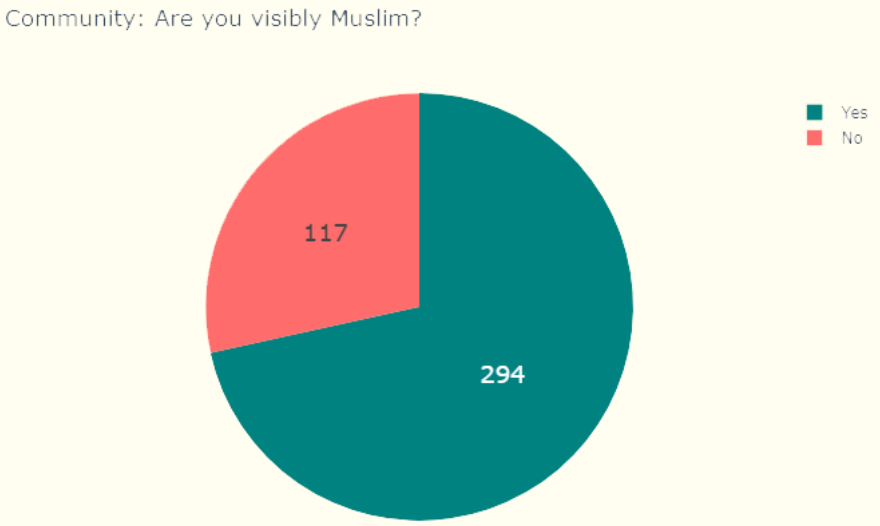


Figure 3: Count of Participants who are visibly Muslim versus those who are not.

The following graph shows the distribution (in percentage) of the religious identity of the participants of the general population survey:

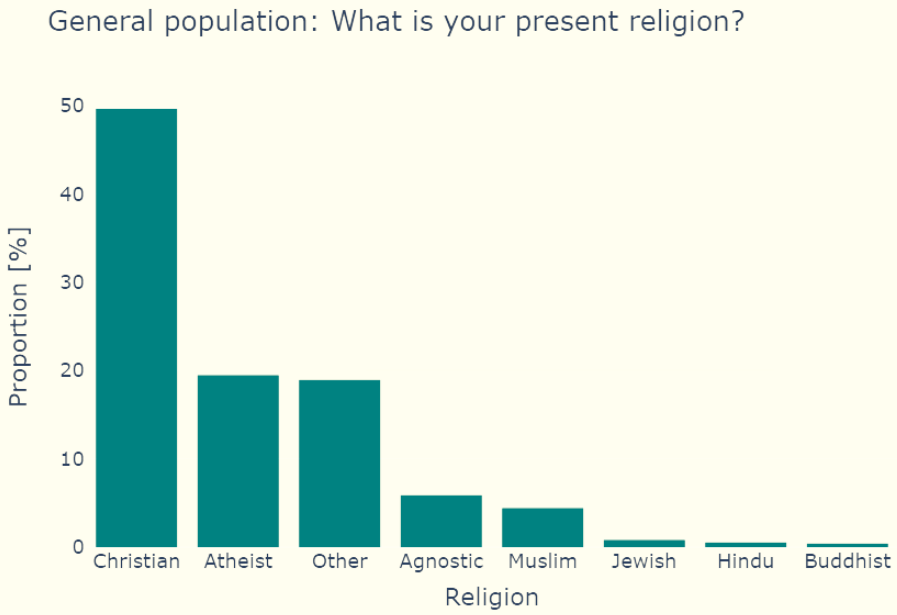


Figure 4: Distribution (in percentage) of the religious identity of participants of the general population.

Age distribution

Of the 411 participants in our community survey, 51.6% were aged between 18 and 24 years, 29.7% are between the ages of 25-34 years, 11.7%% are between 35- 44 years old, 6.3% are between 45 and 54 years old, and 0.7% between 55 and 64. The age distribution of the general population survey was 8.3% between the ages of 18 to 24, 18.9% between 25 and 34, 18.9% between 35 and 44, 17.3% between 45 and 54, 17.3% between 55 and 64, 18.8% are above 65.

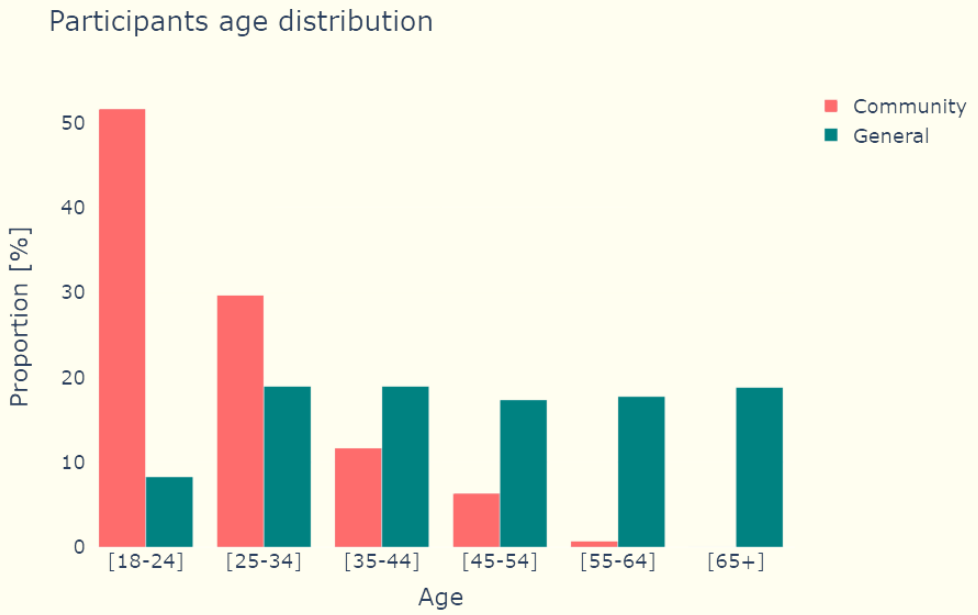


Figure 5: Participants' age distribution (%) for the general population compared to the community population.

This skew towards a younger population in the community survey may be explained in part by the fact that the median age of Muslims in Canada is younger than the general population according to census data from 2021.[3] The median age of Muslims in Québec is estimated at 30 years old compared to 44 years for the rest of Canada. It may also be explained in part by the unintended impact of the use of social media platforms for promotion and recruitment, such as Instagram, which is more popular among younger generations. Finally, it may also be explained by the fact that many of the large social events and community activities where we set up outreach kiosks had more young people in attendance.

Location of participants

Of the 411 community survey participants, 65.95% live on the Island of Montréal and Laval, 18.9% live in the region around Montréal, 11.4% live in the National Capital Region (Québec) and 3.65% live elsewhere in Québec. This geographic distribution correlates with census data which shows that most Muslims who live in Québec live in urban areas. For the general population, 20.74% live on the Island of Montréal, 28.9% live in the region around Montréal, 14.7% live in the National Capital Region and 35% live somewhere else in Québec.

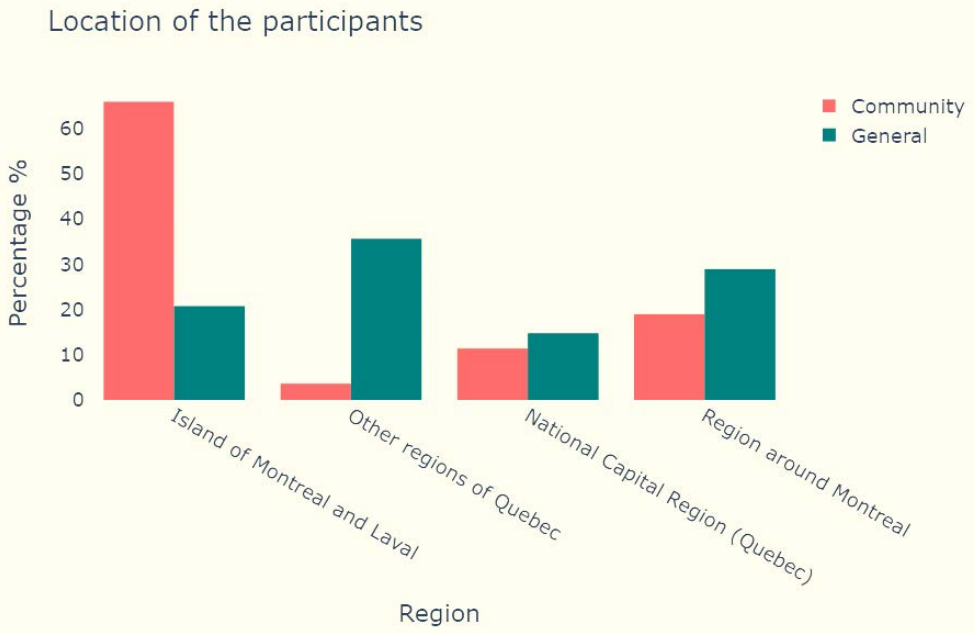


Figure 6: Participants' location distribution (in %) for the general population compared to the general population.

Language

The survey was answered in French by 328 (79.8%) community participants and by 83 (20.2%) participants in English. The general population survey was answered by 561 (74.8%) participants in French and 189 (25.2%) participants in English.

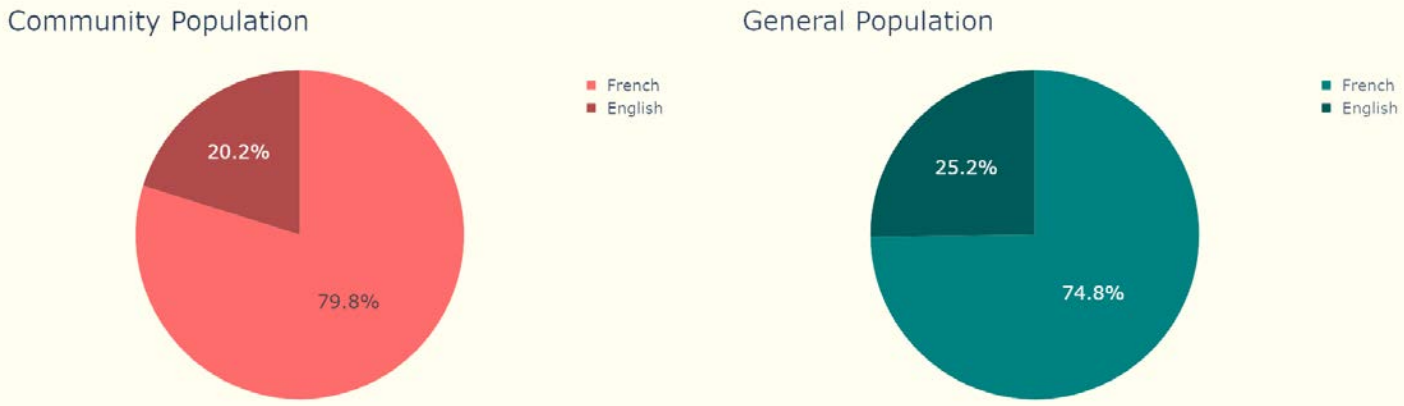


Figure 7: Selected language of survey for the community population (left figure) versus the general population (right figure)

II.

Bill 21 or ‘An Act respecting the laicity of the state’

In March 2019, six months after forming government, the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) introduced Bill 21 in the National Assembly of Québec. It was a proposed piece of legislation that would prohibit the wearing of religious symbols by civil service employees in positions of authority, including police officers, judges, and public school teachers, while on duty.[4] Indeed, the CAQ, led by Francois Legault, had made secularism – and related promises to take action against religious symbols – a centerpiece of their campaign platform in the 2018 provincial election.[5] As many commentators have observed, this translated to the oblique xenophobic targeting of religious minorities during the election campaign, since it was largely Muslims, Sikhs and Jews who would suffer the discriminatory impact of the proposed law. In addition, similar bans in countries like France, Belgium, Switzerland and others, contributed to the growing influence of transnational Islamophobic and racist discourses in Canada.[6] It is in this context of heightened stigmatization of religious minorities that Bill 21 was passed into law on June 16th, 2019 as “An Act respecting the laicity of the state”.

It is important to note that Bill 21 followed years of debates over secularism and religious accommodation in Québec. These debates culminated in the Québec Consultation Commission on Cultural Differences in Accommodation Practices in 2007, chaired by Professors Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor. Events such as the 2006 Multani case[7] and the Hérouxville “Code of Life”[8] case intensified these discussions, with tensions over multiculturalism and Québec identity at the forefront, with media commentators calling it a crisis of national identity. While the Commission contested the notion of a crisis regarding accommodation practices, indicating a disjunction between media portrayals and on-the-ground realities, it acknowledged a prevalent fear among Québecers regarding the perceived impact of immigration and accommodation of minority cultural and religious practices. To mitigate the impact of these tensions on social harmony, the Commission recommended a selective prohibition on the display of religious symbols by individuals holding “coercive” positions, such as judges, prosecutors, and peace officers.[9]

Following the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, subsequent Québec governments proposed bills addressing secularism and accommodation. Introduced in 2010, Bill 94 attempted to ban face coverings on individuals providing or receiving public services. Bill 60, introduced in 2013, aimed to ban visible religious symbols in state institutions, but was dropped after the 2014 election. Similar principles reappeared in Bill 62 in 2017, focusing on state neutrality by prohibiting face coverings in public services, but was struck down as a result of a legal challenge.[10] In each of these attempts, concerns about the practices of religious minority groups – especially Muslim women – featured prominently in public discourse. Finally, in 2019, Bill 21 became law.

How Bill 21 came to pass

The passing of Bill 21 into law was not without significant consternation and opposition. Throughout the legislative debates leading to the passage of Bill 21, there emerged a clear delineation of deeply held convictions and ideological divides among legislators. Opposition parties, such as the Québec Liberal Party and Québec Solidaire, criticized the government's approach to the legislation, raising concerns about potential infringements on individual rights and freedoms. The CAQ defended its position, emphasizing the paramount importance of secularism and state neutrality in public institutions in bringing about social harmony, and the support it received from a majority of Quebecers. It is important to note that while Bill 21 may have enjoyed the tentative support[11] of a majority of Quebecers leading up to its passage into law, a 2022 poll also shows that such support has declined noticeably over the years as concerns over its implementation and impact arose.[12]

Leading up to the passage of the Bill, the government held limited public consultations and hearings with the stated objective of providing a platform for diverse stakeholders to voice their opinions. However, critics of the Bill argued that the consultation period, which spanned only a few weeks, was insufficient for meaningful engagement, hindering genuine dialogue with affected communities. Furthermore, concerns were raised about limited opportunities for participation, particularly from marginalized or underrepresented groups.[13] Indeed, the original list of those invited to make submissions included only one coalition group in opposition to the law, and no groups representing religious minorities such as Muslim, Sikh or Jewish Québecers.[14] These observed shortcomings fueled skepticism regarding the government's commitment to genuine engagement with affected communities. Notably, the two individuals who previously served as commissioners for the Bouchard-Taylor report did not endorse this law. Gérard Bouchard, for instance, described the bill as "radical" and lacking justification.[15]

However, despite vocal opposition from various groups – including other political parties, civil liberties groups, and segments of the public – the governing CAQ, holding a majority of seats in the legislature, ensured its passage. With 73 affirmative votes and 35 in opposition, Bill 21 officially became law,[16] with the CAQ government invoking closure measures to limit debate and expedite its passage.[17]

What makes Bill 21 distinct

While the passage of Bill 21 follows a decades-long debate over secularism and the rights of minorities, it is important to note that it goes much further than preceding attempts in Québec to legislate discrimination against religious minorities in the name of secularism. There are several features of the Act that make it distinct including, but not limited to, its proposed mechanisms for enforcement, the grandfather clause, and the use of the notwithstanding clause to circumvent constitutionally protected rights in the name of secularism.

The Act defines what constitutes a religious symbol in section 6 – "any object, including clothing, a symbol, jewelry, an adornment, an accessory or headwear, that (1) is worn in connection with a religious conviction or belief; or (2) is reasonably considered as referring to a religious affiliation".[18] It also designates responsibility for ensuring compliance with the prohibition against wearing religious symbols to individuals possessing the highest administrative control over the affected individuals. The failure to adhere to these prescribed measures could result in disciplinary action. As policymakers and legal experts observed at the time, this system could lead to workplace cultures of policing and surveillance that could become toxic and alienating for religious minorities impacted by the law.[19]

Furthermore, responding to critiques that Bill 21 would lead to job losses of religious minorities, the CAQ government included a grandfather clause, as stipulated in section 31 of the Act. The grandfather clause allows certain individuals who were employed in positions covered by the law before its implementation to continue wearing religious symbols while performing their duties. However, this provision comes with the condition that these individuals must exercise the same function within the same organization. While initially safeguarding the rights of existing employees, the grandfather clause introduces a two-tiered system in career advancement, among other things, for those constrained by the law.

Perhaps the most controversial element of Bill 21 is the usage of the notwithstanding clause (section 33) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The use of the notwithstanding clause in Bill 21 has drawn considerable attention from civil liberties organizations, legal experts, and groups representing minorities.[20] The clause grants federal, provincial, and territorial bodies the authority to temporarily suspend the rights and liberties delineated in section 2 (fundamental freedoms), sections 7 to 14 (legal rights) and section 15 (equality rights) of the Charter.[21] By invoking this clause, the government acknowledges its violation of fundamental rights and aims to circumvent constitutional obligations. The CAQ government's unprecedented use of the notwithstanding clause to conscribe the rights and freedoms or racialized and religious minorities has been cause for alarm for many about the strength of the constitution to protect human rights and freedoms, especially as it impacts minorities.[22] Notably, the reevaluation of the use of the notwithstanding clause was slated for 2024, marking five years since the passing of Bill 21.

The Québec government announced its intent to renew the clause to uphold Bill 21 and shield it from legal challenges in the spring of 2024, citing the need to protect social peace and harmony created by Bill 21[23] – a claim that this study challenges.

Opposition to the Bill

The enactment of Bill 21 sparked widespread public demonstrations and protests across Québec and other parts of Canada, which served as highly visible displays of dissent and solidarity, attracting international media attention and exerting pressure on political leaders to reconsider their support for the law. In addition to protests, social media emerged as a significant platform for mobilization against Bill 21. Activists utilized platforms to amplify their voices, with hashtags like #Bill21 and #QuébecBan trending. The passage of Bill 21 also elicited reactions beyond Québec, with international media outlets and human rights organizations weighing in. Indeed, international human rights and civil society organizations, such as Amnesty International and the United Nations Association in Canada, openly voiced their opposition to Bill 21, viewing it as indicative of growing xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment.[24]

In response to the law, some politicians and public figures made political commitments and symbolic gestures to oppose the law. Several municipalities outside of Québec, for instance, passed motions denouncing the legislation, while others reaffirmed their commitment to diversity and inclusivity. These actions were seen as expressions of solidarity with affected communities and as statements against the perceived intolerance underlying the Bill.[25]

Several legal challenges have also been brought against Bill 21, contending that it violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These challenges have led to court proceedings and rulings that have intensified public discourse and political debate regarding the law's legality and constitutionality. Initially, NCCM, The Canadian Civil Liberties Association and plaintiff Ichrak Nourel Hak, sought to suspend the law's operation until its constitutional merits were decided, but this request was denied both at the Superior Court and at the Appeal Court, allowing the law to remain in effect pending a judgment on its legal merits.[26]

Hearings before the Québec Superior Court on the merits of the law took place in the fall of 2020. In 2021, the Québec Superior Court upheld the ban on religious symbols for most public employees, but certain provisions were deemed unconstitutional by Judge Marc-André Blanchard. Notably, the judge ruled that the law should not apply to English school boards due to their linguistic minority rights, nor to members of the National Assembly. He also cited the notwithstanding clause as a major reason why he was unable to overturn other parts of the law. This decision was appealed by both parties.

Subsequent hearings at the Québec Court of Appeal, which took place in the fall of 2022, involved more than ten interveners, including a cross section of religious minorities, as well as various civil liberties and human rights organizations. One significant theme addressed during the oral arguments before the Québec Court of Appeal was that of gender equality. This builds on Judge Blanchard's note that the evidence suggests Bill 21 will disproportionately impact Muslim women.[27] Nevertheless, the Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the Québec government in the spring of 2024, which again speaks to the constraints imposed by the notwithstanding clause.[28] Several affected parties have announced their intention to appeal this decision at the Supreme Court, including the NCCM and CCLA.

Review of Impact Studies of Bill 21

As mentioned, this study contributes to a growing body of research on the impacts of Bill 21. Several studies have made visible various aspects of the impact of the law since it was passed.

In a 2022 survey of the impacts of Bill 21 conducted by the Association of Canadian Studies and Leger Marketing, the authors found that minority groups report facing increased discrimination, affecting their overall well-being. The study further found that Muslim women were particularly vulnerable to stigmatization and marginalization, with a decline in their sense of belonging within Québec society and a hindering of their social and political involvement. Moreover, the study found that discrimination against religious minorities occurs in various

places, from workplaces to public areas, sometimes leading to threats of violence. According to the report, this trend disproportionately affects Muslim women, Jewish men, and Sikh men, amplifying concerns over their safety and well-being within the broader societal context in Québec.[29]

Another 2022 study focusing on post-secondary students in law and education in Québec reveals a surge in discrimination against individuals wearing religious symbols following Bill 21's implementation.[30] This discrimination extends to reduced job opportunities and increased hostility, prompting some to consider leaving the province. The study also found generational differences in attitudes towards the law, with younger Québecers expressing less support for it, and worsened perceptions of Québec among young residents, including those not from religious or ethnic minorities. According to the study, regardless of religious affiliation, respondents saw the law as an attack on the Muslim community.

Academic scholarship across a range of disciplines (law, sociology, political science, anti-racism studies, amongst others) has also analyzed the broader implications of Bill 21 for fundamental freedoms and human rights, with many arguing that Bill 21 sets a dangerous precedent in Québec of legitimizing and exacerbating the oppression and persecution of racialized minorities in the name of secularism.[31] In particular, several scholars have pointed out how the gendered Islamophobia leveled at women who wear a hijab or niqab that has accompanied the passage of Bill 21 is symptomatic of deeper issues of exclusion and systemic discrimination.[32] Scholars of secularism laws have also pointed to examples of extended indirect impacts of laws like Bill 21 in other jurisdictions such as France, raising concerns about the potential for similar impacts here in Québec.[33] Indeed, these concerns informed the impetus for this study.

Labor Shortages

In addition to the context of the implementation of Bill 21, Muslim women's employment and job search experiences take place in the intersecting economic context of increasing labour shortages in Québec. The number of unemployed people in Québec has been decreasing, whereas the number of available job positions is increasing. During the second quarter of 2021, for instance, Québec ranked second in the country for its job vacancy rate.[34] Indeed, in November 2022, unemployment in Québec reached 3.8%, an all-time low since 1976, with a sharp drop in the number of unemployed since 2015. This steady decline in unemployment over several years has led to a significant drop in the number of unemployed, from 344,200 to

176,800 between December 2015 and November 2022. However, this is creating increasing recruitment difficulties for companies. The scarcity of labor is due in part to the mass retirement of baby boomers and a limited number of young people to replace them. A recent analysis shows that almost 41% of occupations will experience a labour shortage by 2025, particularly in the public, early childhood and community sectors.[35] belonging within Québec society and a hindering of their social and political involvement.

The Québec government has claimed that it aims to enhance crucial public services like education, healthcare, and social support while ensuring accessible childcare. In its 2021 economic update, it pledges over $3.3 billion by 2025-2026 to address labour shortages by facilitating training, requalification, and talent attraction. To foster targeted sectoral growth, nearly $3.9 billion will be invested over five years. Goals include improving working conditions, boosting graduation rates, enticing retirees back to work, and attracting foreign talent.[36] There is no doubt that immigration significantly contributes to Québec's workforce and helps counteract demographic shifts. Between 2009 and 2019, immigrants aged 15 and above filled around 285,700 new jobs, constituting about 63% of total job growth.[37] Nevertheless in 2023, despite these shortages and the objections of employers, the Québec government also introduced restrictions on immigrants, asylum seekers, and temporary workers, making the French language a pre-requisite for living and working in Québec.[38]

Moreover, there was already much room for improvement in integrating newcomers into the labor market, as their employment rate is lower than that of native-born Québécois. In 2019, the employment rate for immigrants aged 25 to 54 stood at 79.7%, compared to 87.2% for native-born residents.[39] Indeed, certain populations, such as First Nation peoples, visible minorities and immigrants, still face barriers to employment due to persistent discrimination in the hiring process. These barriers include prejudice, discriminatory practices, lack of training and restrictive hiring policies.[40]

In addition, during the public consultations on Bill 21, the Québec Provincial Association of Teachers highlighted the impact of such measures on the labour shortage:

> **In a context where several teachers leave the profession within the first five years of their career, where it seems increasingly difficult for school boards to recruit legally qualified teachers to fill vacant positions amid the current shortage, and where the anticipated increase in student enrollment in our schools will pose a significant challenge in the years to come, depriving oneself of teaching candidates due to their religious beliefs appears completely illogical.**[41]

Recruitment difficulties are therefore not only due to a genuine shortage of qualified workers, but also to other manufactured factors. Solutions, accordingly, require a broader approach than simply making more workers available.[42] This study analyzes how Bill 21 contributes to these economic challenges.

III.
Job Search Experiences

Based on survey and interview data, the findings of our study related to job search experiences provide insights into how Muslim women were navigating a social, political and economic context shaped by Bill 21, the COVID-19 pandemic and labour shortages in Quebec as they looked for work.

Our findings indicate that since Bill 21 was passed, religious identity played a prominent role in areas of employment well beyond the scope of the law. Many have attributed this to an emboldening effect of the law, where those who harbour prejudices against Muslim women who wear a hijab or niqab may feel that their prejudicial views have been vindicated by the passage of the law.[43] This trend is visible in Muslim women's job search experiences as they navigate negative perceptions of their identities in employment search and recruitment processes. Our study found that Muslim women were active and willing participants in the workforce, but faced many barriers to employment, some of which were illegal under Québec law.

Amongst the 411 women we surveyed, 194 women had been in the job market at some point since the passage of Bill 21, among which 70 women have experienced a change in their employment: they either quit their jobs (56) or were fired (14) since June 2019. Two of the ten women we interviewed had also been in the job market during this period.

Among the 70 women who experienced a job loss since 2019, 51 were actively looking for employment in a variety of sectors, including retail, healthcare, corporate, banking and social services, amongst others. Figure 1 below shows the proportion of participants having searched for a job in these sectors:

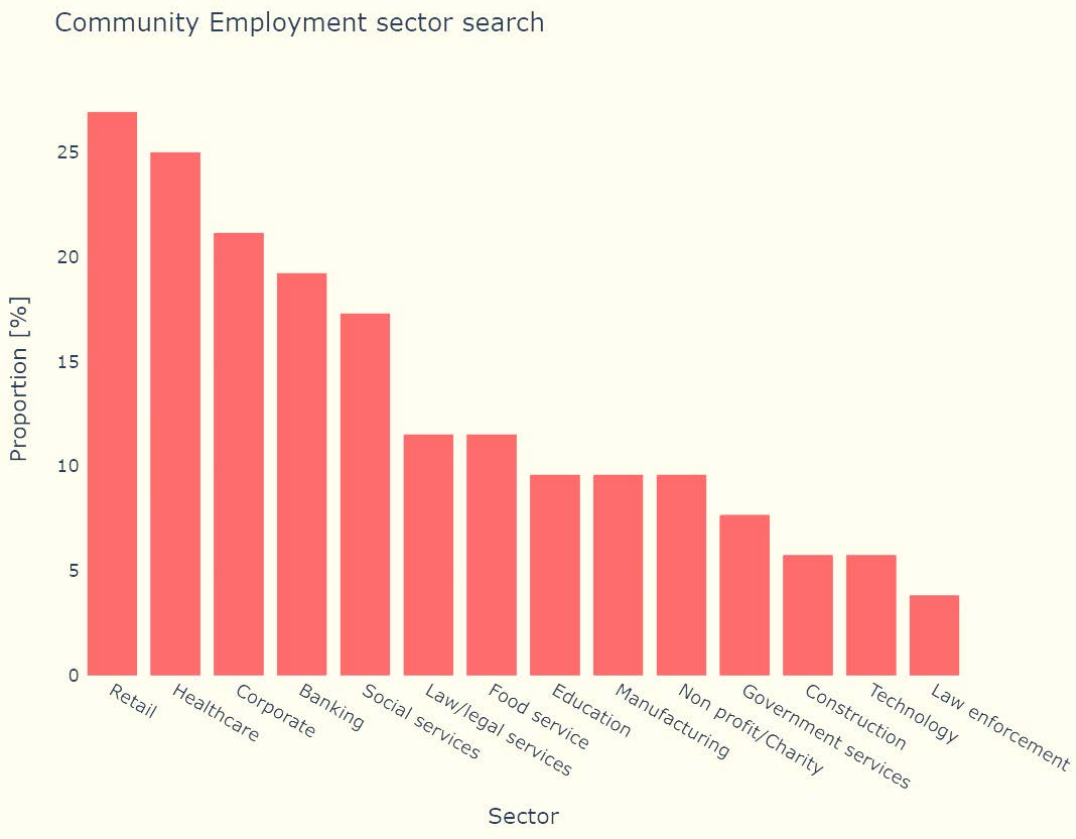


Figure 8: Employment sectors in which Muslim women searched for employment. Note: participants could select more than one sector.

Among those actively looking for a job, 73% found a job within 6 months, which is similar in proportion to the general population (72%). However, it takes on average more time for Muslim women to find a job within those 6 months. This is demonstrated in Figure 2, with 66% of the general population looking for a job becoming employed within 1-2 months, compared to only 44% for Muslim women. The remaining 29% of Muslim women will require 1 to 4 additional months to find a job, compared to only 6% for the general population. This tendency is even worse for visibly Muslim women: 1-2 months: 41.17% (-25% compared to the general population) and 3-6 months: 32.35% (+26.47%).

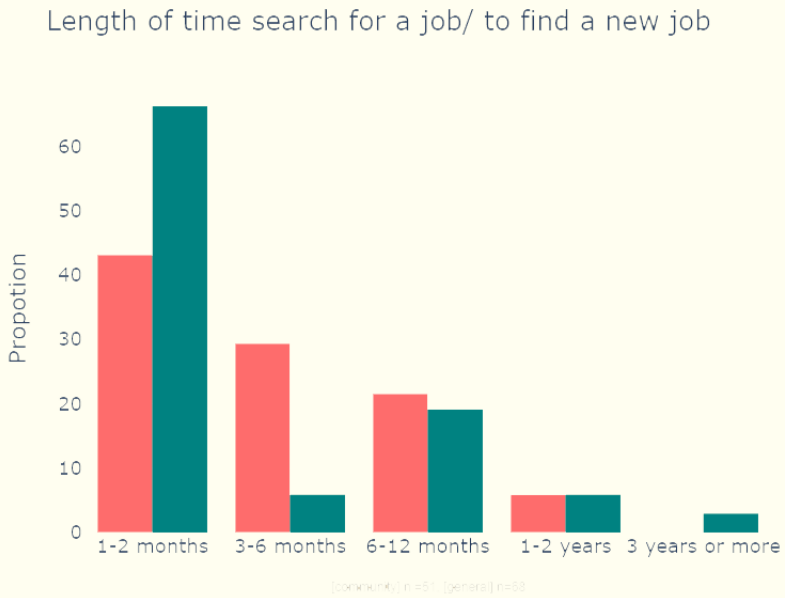


Figure 9: Time required to find a new job for Muslim Women (Community) compared to the general population (General)

Overall, 73% of the women we surveyed felt that Bill 21 impacted their job search experience (vs. 8% of general population), with 23% saying it was greatly impacted.

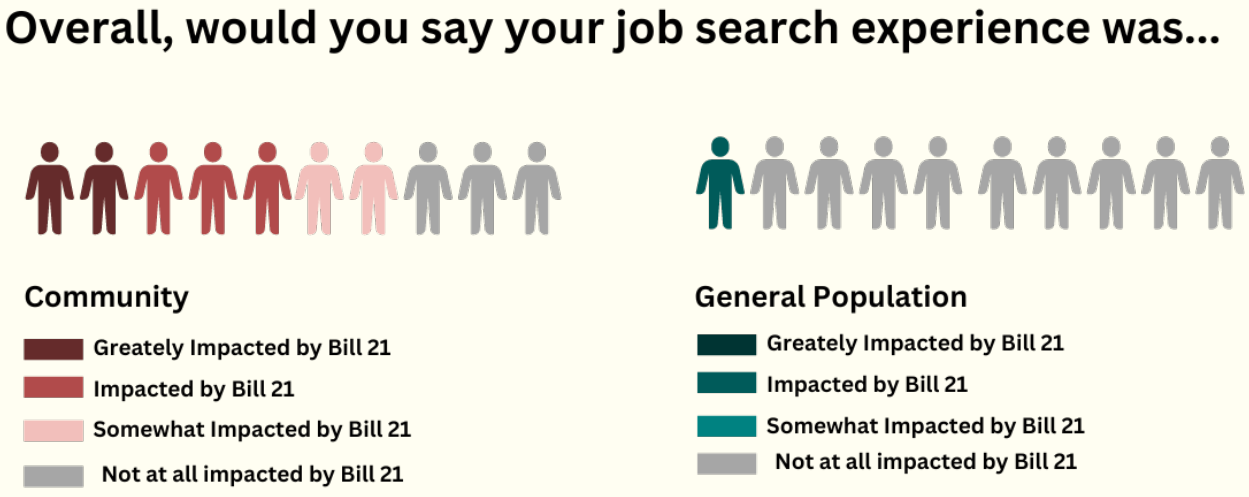


Figure 10: Infographics showing the proportion of participants out of 10 reporting how much was their job search impacted by Bill 21 for the community population (to the right with N=52) compared with the general population (to the left with N=68)

Recruitment Processes

As the Muslim women we surveyed navigated the job market in Québec, many of them felt that their religious identity featured prominently in job search experiences from interviews, offers, rejections, and use of employment services, since Bill 21 became law. Despite interview questions about religion being illegal according to the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits dela jeunesse,[44] 50% of Muslim women surveyed reported that there was a significant or some increase in how many times they were asked about their religious practice during a job interview since Bill 21 became law. This is in stark contrast to the responses we received from our survey of the general population where only 5.88% of respondents experienced an increase.

Sophia, a lawyer who wears a hijab, described how her decision to join the federal public service was shaped by the way she was treated in job interviews in other areas of practice. Since the name on her CV was a typical Québecois name, her interviewers were surprised when she would arrive at interviews wearing a hijab. She described being asked directly about her religious identity, her practice of wearing a hijab and whether or not she was prepared to remove it, as well as questions probing her opinions on political debates on topics like religious accommodations. Her frustration was further compounded by the fact that her interviewers were typically lawyers who should know that asking such questions during a job interview is illegal. She became so frustrated with her job search experience that she started offering information that she wears a hijab up front so that she does not waste her time on interviewers who were not prepared to work with a hijab-wearing woman. She recounted one occasion where the interviewer cancelled the interview right away upon learning that she wears a hijab.

Moreover, she observed, “if the employer thinks that his clientele will feel less often comfortable with you because you have the headscarf, even if he doesn’t necessarily have any problems, that will still have an impact. I am aware of that.”

Amal, one of the interview respondents who is a lawyer by training and works in the banking sector, had a similar sentiment. She felt that in her job search experiences, employers were making a calculated decision based on how clients may feel about being served by a visibly Muslim woman and how it would impact their reputation: “They would think, if we accept this lawyer, then it would be detrimental for our own business because then the clients wouldn’t feel comfortable.”

Job Offers and Rejections

Whether they could prove it or not, 48% of Muslim women felt that the reason they did not get a job was because of their religious identity. Again, only 5.88% of the general population felt the same way about being rejected for a job. We observed a similar trend amongst our interview respondents, many of whom were suspicious of the way their recruitment journeys ended with abrupt rejections. In one case, a respondent had her first interview over the phone and when she showed up in person for the second round, she felt she was treated differently and did not make it further in the process. Another respondent recounted how she applied for a position in the public education sector and made it all the way to the offer stage, but part of her offer included a form asking her to abide by Bill 21, and accordingly, to remove her hijab. She was torn because she made it to the offer stage based on her experience and merit but was forced to decline the offer in the end because of Bill 21.

The undue prominence of religious identity in Muslim women's employment search was also felt when they worked with employment agencies to find suitable job postings, prepare application materials, and prepare for job interviews.

According to the responses to our survey, Muslim women utilized the services of employment agencies at a higher rate than the general population (46.15% vs 26.47%) since the passage of Bill 21. This may in part be explained by the younger average age of the community survey respondents, but it also indicates that the Muslim women in Québec we surveyed are clearly eager to participate in the workforce, contribute to society, and are actively searching for avenues to succeed in building their careers.

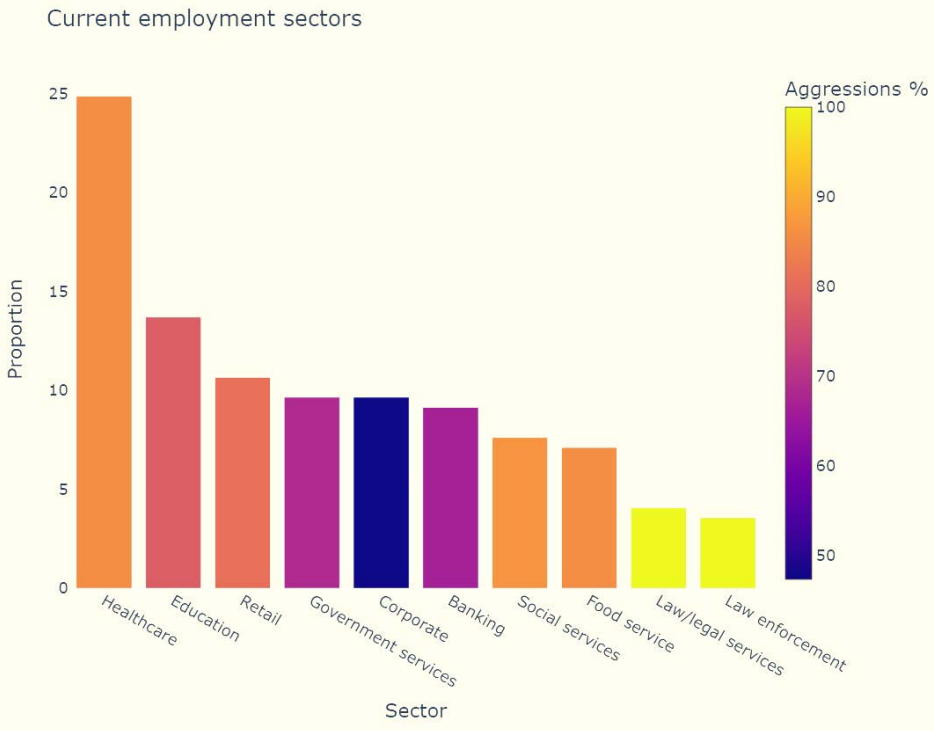
75% of Muslim women surveyed reported that their religious identity affected or may have affected their experience with an employment service (vs. 27% of the general population). Given that the women we surveyed were mostly looking for jobs outside of the sectors implicated by Bill 21, the curious prominence of religious identity in their experiences with employment agencies may be indicative of a blurring of the boundaries of Bill 21, such that the barriers Muslim women may face in workplaces are broadened. As such, strategizing around religious identity, such as bracing for questions about their hijab, niqab or Islam more broadly during interviews, is part and parcel of the job search experience for many Muslim women in Québec.

IV.
Experiences at Work

Workplaces in Québec are regulated by a combination of several laws and policies that are meant to ensure workplace safety and protections against discrimination and harassment.[45]

While Bill 21 permits discriminatory practices against those who wear religious symbols in several public sector jobs (contrary to some of the protections afforded in these laws), our study shows Bill 21 may have weakened these laws as indicated by their ineffectiveness in providing protections to Québec Muslim women who work in areas of employment outside of the scope of Bill 21 in the period following its passage. According to reports from the Muslim women in Québec who participated in our study, they are facing increasingly hostile work environments within and beyond employment sectors included in Bill 21, including Islamophobic discrimination and physical threats and aggression.

Of the 411 Muslim women surveyed, 196 women were currently employed in a range of employment sectors, with the largest proportion being employed in Québec's healthcare system (25%). 146 out of the 196 women currently employed are wearing a religious symbol versus 50 who are not wearing any religious symbol.



Overall, 72% of Muslim women felt that their employment experience was impacted by Bill 21 in one way or another, compared with only 6% of the general population.

Figure 11: Participants' current employment distribution (in %) for the community population with a heat map representing the proportion of women in each section who experiences aggressions.

Islamophobic and racist remarks at work

We asked the women we surveyed about their experiences with their colleagues, clients or customers as well as their supervisors. In all three categories, we found that Muslim women in Québec face alarmingly high levels of direct and indirect hostility targeting their religious identity, especially when contrasted with the comparatively low levels reported by the general population. That is to say, these hostile sentiments appear not to be about religious identity writ large in the sense that the general population, who identify as mostly Christian, did not

report the same rise in hostility. Though not surprising, Bill 21 appears to have had a significant impact on the employment experiences of Muslim women specifically, indicating that there may be more hostile remarks about Muslim religious identity in workplaces than other religious identities. Nearly all of the women we conducted semi-structured interviews with echoed these findings when recounting their experiences at work.

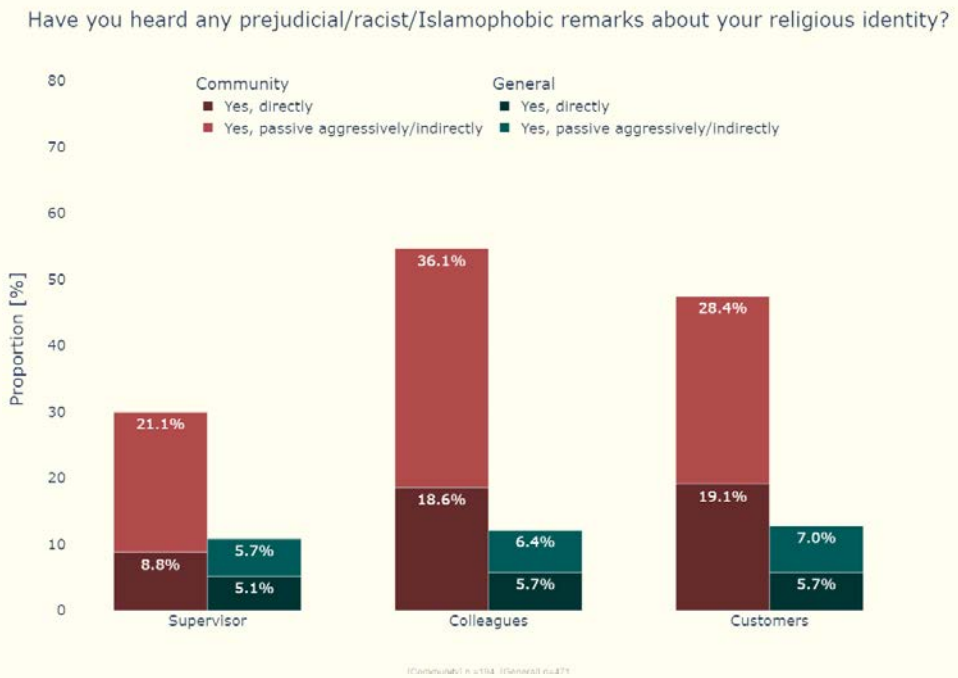


Figure 12: Proportion of participants who heard supervisors, colleagues, or customers make prejudicial/racist/Islamophobic remarks for the community population (N= 194) versus the General population (N=471)

Islamophobic and racist remarks at work

More than half (54%) of the women we surveyed who are currently employed have heard their colleagues make prejudicial/racist/Islamophobic remarks about their religious identity at work (vs. 12% of general population). From the interviews we conducted for this study, we can gain some insights from examples of what these remarks were like, and how they were experienced by the women who participated in the study. For instance, one of the interview respondents for this study, Dunia, a nurse in Québec City who wears a hijab, told us about how some of her colleagues talked about Muslim women in relation to the passage of Bill 21: "They think a woman who really wants to work just has to take off her religious symbol." She went on to describe her experiences with some of her colleagues:

"Sometimes you know they're talking behind your back but you don't know exactly what they're saying. For example, when I was a facilitator in a centre for people with disabilities, I worked with a woman. We had done the training together. She looked very angry and I didn't know why. She left to lodge a complaint with the coordinator. I would never have known, but the coordinator came to tell me that she was not going to report me because everything the woman said was purely racist. I went to see [my colleague] after, smiling, offering my help. She stared at me, sighed and then she left. She hadn't expected this reaction from me."

Dunia explained that she never found out what her colleague's complaint was about, other than it had something to do with anti-Muslim racism because Dunia wore a hijab.

Dunia went on to recount that one of her most uncomfortable experiences was with a doctor and another staff member as they were discussing a patient in an office that didn't have enough seating for all three of them. She explained, "I was looking for a place to sit and take my notes. The doctor told me, if you want you can sit on me. The other staff man told him, no she's going to be okay." Dunia was grateful for the intervention of the other staff member, but was deeply disappointed by being made to feel fetishized by the doctor. She explained that this was not an unusual experience: "Patients or colleagues who want to get to know me end up asking me how my hair is. There are also other sexist comments about me being exotic... [it's like]

> **"When they don't hate you, they fetishize you."**

In another healthcare setting, Maryam, a medical resident who wears a hijab, recalled the climate in her workplace after Bill 21 became law. She mentioned she was surprised by how many colleagues would tell her, seemingly out of the blue, that they agree with Bill 21. Maryam went on to state, "It was a shock. I said to myself, this person will have to take care of the patients who are directly affected by Bill 21!"

Natalie, a teacher in the English Montréal School Board who wears a hijab, recounted a conversation in the staff lounge about a terror attack that had made headlines. She explained that she was standing with some colleagues during her break as they were discussing the attack and one of her colleagues said, "You never know with ISIS. They could be anywhere, they could be anyone." Natalie went on to recount, "Everyone looked at me. I was standing right next to her and I'm thinking, you think I am like some super agent?"

One of the women we interviewed, Sophia, worked for the federal government. She identifies as a white Québecoise woman who converted to Islam some time ago and wears a hijab. Her account of experiences with her colleagues since the passage of Bill 21 are indicative of the prevalence of stereotypes of Muslim women being oppressed or submissive. For example, one of her colleagues asked her, "Do you wear the headscarf because your husband is a Muslim?" In her interpretation of the conversation, her colleague was insinuating that she was an oppressed or brainwashed Québecoise woman who could not have made the choice to wear a hijab of her own free will.

Clients/Customers

Nearly half of the women we surveyed (48%) have heard prejudicial/racist/Islamophobic remarks about their religious identity at work from clients or customers (vs.13% of general population).

When asked about experiences with customers, one interview participant, Sarah, who wears a hijab and works at a mall kiosk, responded with exasperation, recollecting how many hostile interactions she had had with customers: “People say things to me with so much hatred...I received several times looks of hatred [from customers]...I became used to looks of hate, I see their comments through their looks. Some have looks of curiosity, but others are looks of hate.” For Sarah, the feeling of being watched persisted throughout her workday at the mall, even during her breaks: “I feel very uncomfortable when I sit down to eat and get stares.”

For other women, the hostilities did not come in the form of face-to-face interactions. One of the interview respondents for this study, Meriam, described her experience of receiving racially charged mail at work. Meriam was hired as a teacher in Québec amidst the confusion over Bill 21’s applicability to English school boards. Her employment as a teacher was terminated shortly after because of Bill 21 and she was moved to a non-teaching position within the school. While Meriam received an outpouring of support from her colleagues, students and parents who thought she was being treated unfairly, she also received hostile and hateful comments directed at her religious identity as a hijab-wearing Muslim woman. In one instance, she received mail at work that contained a letter addressed to her with, what she described as, an “essay” that detailed why Bill 21 was justified and why she was wrong to wear a hijab. Meriam felt threatened not only by the content of the letter and essay, but also by the fact that this individual knew where she worked.

In another education context in Montréal, Natalie, a high school teacher, described the types of remarks she heard from students and parents: “Parents will think it’s okay to speak to me a certain way and make certain comments. “Once a student trying to disrupt her class yelled “Allahu Akbar.” After the passage of Bill 21, she had an encounter with a student who was late for class and was wearing a hat in school, which was a violation of the school dress code. She asked the student to remove his hat and told him he was late, but the student went on “bad-mouthing” her and at one point he said, “She should take off her own hat,” referring to her hijab. Natalie responded to the student to explain that what he said is inappropriate and racist. One of her colleagues then intervened and reported her to the principal for being aggressive to the student. Natalie expressed feeling treated unfairly for speaking to the student about his “ignorant” remark: “So what was now being said about me was that Natalie is a very aggressive teacher.”

Dunia, a nurse who worked at a hospital taking care of patients described how a patient didn’t want to be seen by her because she was Muslim: “He didn’t even know me and he judged me by my looks. Its dehumanizing. I’m not just a hijab. I am more than that.” She added, “I know I’m not the only one. It happens to other Muslim women. It also happens to Black women.” Another patient told her, “take off your hat,” when she came into the room to treat him. But, as with her experiences with her colleagues mentioned above, she also had several encounters with patients who fetishized her as an exotic veiled woman: “Patients have told me things like, ‘you are pretty despite your veil’...‘you are exotic’...‘I find the veil sexy.’” Dunia explained these interactions as objectifying and intrusive: “There is an objectification of your body because they can’t see it, so they try to imagine by asking questions.”

Maryam also experienced similar gendered Islamophobic comments from patients while she was a medical resident at a teaching hospital. In front of patients, one of her colleagues asked her why she felt compelled to put on a hijab and went on to make sexist comments, disparaging her ability to practice emergency medicine as a woman.

Supervisors

Perhaps more concerningly, 30% of the Muslim women we surveyed report having heard prejudicial/racist/Islamophobic remarks about their religious identity at work from a supervisor (vs. 11% of general population).

Salma described her experiences as a woman who wears a niqab and is passionate about becoming a teacher. During her teacher training placement at a school, one of her supervisors made remarks suggesting that she is in the wrong field and that she is not "fit to teach" because she wears a niqab. Another interviewee, Natalie, who is a teacher who wears a hijab, also described being questioned about her capabilities and being subjected to an unscheduled "evaluation" by a new supervisor, despite her decades long career as a teacher.

Microaggressions

In addition to hearing direct remarks about their religious identities, Muslim women also report experiencing high levels of microaggressions since the passage of Bill 21: 39% of Muslim women report experiencing microaggressions at work (vs. 4% of general population).

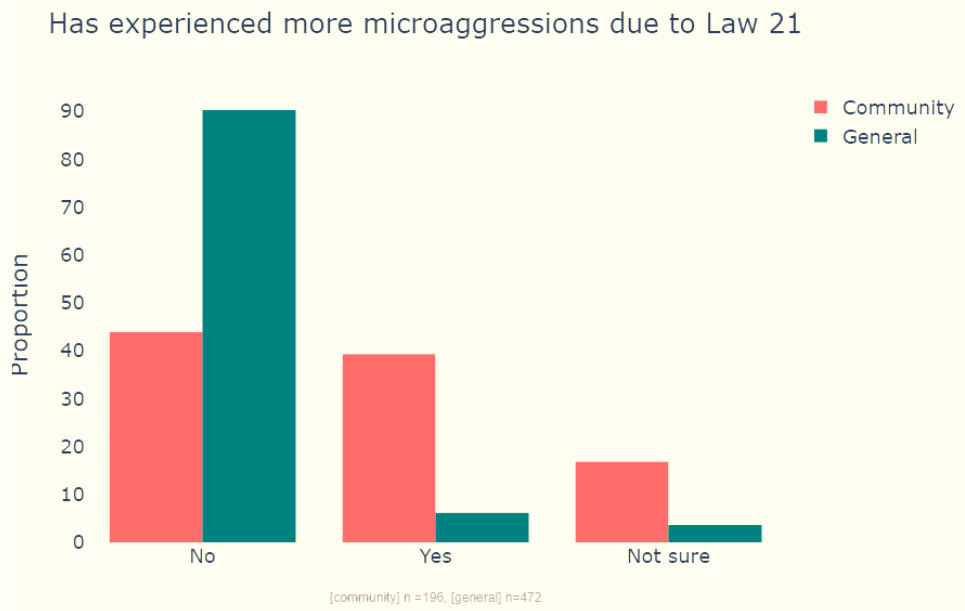


Figure 13: Proportion of surveyed participants within the community (n=196) versus the general population (n=472) who reported having experienced more microaggressions since Law 21 came into effect.

Microaggressions, while often unintentional, can lead to creating a work environment that is alienating and ostracizing. Natalie, for instance, described how she was routinely left out of social events with her colleagues from the school she taught at: "The majority of my colleagues would get together outside of school and me and my husband would never get invited...as much as they used to tell me you're part of our family, [I] turned out not to be." Dunia, a nurse, similarly noted that she was not invited to many social events with her colleagues from the hospital.

Beyond being left out of collegial social events, which are often also opportunities for networking and team building, many women we interviewed described Islamophobic and racist slights. Most common amongst the women we interviewed were experiences of colleagues, clients/customers, and supervisors in their workplaces assuming they were foreign. Sophia, a Muslim woman who identified as white Québecoise, explained how since she started wearing a hijab, she noticed that she was frequently asked where she is from – a question she never received in Québec before she started wearing a hijab. Similarly, Sarah, another interviewee who works in the federal public service said, "The mere fact that I am veiled leads them to the conclusion that I am a foreigner." Maryam, a medical resident who wears a hijab, mentioned how she is always mistaken for an international student, which, according to Maryam, comes with its own set of prejudices. She described being told by her evaluator that she was "adapting really well to a new healthcare system" and she was offered access to supports available to international students to help her acclimatize, even though she was from Québec.

Several interviewees also described microaggressions that came in the form of compliments about their accents or command of the French language. Dunia observed that people see her as foreign until she speaks French in her Québec accent. Sophia also mentioned that she was told multiple times by clients, colleagues and others that she speaks French well "for a Muslim."

Many of the women we interviewed for this study expressed a level of discomfort with seemingly innocent questions that they intuitively felt were laced with racist and Islamophobic undertones. For example, Sophia talked about how she encountered invasive questions about her hijab that she found absurd, such as questions about what she does with her hijab when she has to take a bath. She also mentioned an experience with a colleague who asked her if it would be a sin for her if he saw her hair, which she interpreted as a disingenuous question that was really about making her feel uncomfortable and disparaging her religious beliefs by implying that her beliefs about showing hair being a sin were ridiculous. As she explained, "They have a bit of this reflex of ridiculing what a sin is by implying that it is exaggerated."

Salama, a teacher by training who wears a niqab mentioned that one of the ways she noticed she was treated unfairly was that she felt she was being given an increasingly heavy workload, while simultaneously being told that she was not doing a good job. This type of passive aggressive intimidation by supervisors was not uncommon amongst our interviewees. Soundous, a teacher who wears a hijab, expressed a similar experience of feeling like she was being unduly scrutinized at her work after the passage of Bill 21, even though she had been working as a teacher for over ten years. Maryam, a medical resident, had a similar experience of being told that she was very efficient, but then being denied the opportunity to act as team lead, an opportunity many of her peers received.

Examples of microaggressions

- Leaving Muslim women out of social gatherings after work
- Assuming Muslim women are foreign
- Treating those assumed to be foreign as less than
- Commenting on Muslim women being articulate or on their English or French accents
- Sexual inuendo in questions about the hijab or niqab
- Being given a higher or more challenging workload than colleagues to make Muslim women prove themselves

Physical threats and aggression

Given the levels of hostility described in the previous section, it is not surprising, albeit highly concerning, that more of the Muslim women we surveyed have faced physical threats and aggression in their workplaces than their counterparts in the general population sample. In our survey, we explained physical threats by giving examples such as "someone verbally threatening to hurt you, take off your hijab etc." We explained physical aggression as "being physically intimidated, unwanted touching, being pushed or shoved, touching or removing your hijab or niqab etc."

Like the questions related to Islamophobic remarks, we also asked separate questions about physical threats and aggression perpetrated by colleagues, clients or customers, and supervisors. In all three categories, Muslim women faced higher levels of physical threats and aggression than the general population, with the smallest gap between the two samples from clients and customers, and the largest gap from supervisors.

Nearly 1 in 6 (17%) Muslim women we surveyed have experienced physical threats or aggression from their colleagues (vs. 8% of the general population surveyed). 17% have experienced physical threats or aggression from clients or customers (vs. 12% of the general population). An alarming 17% have experienced physical threats or aggression from a supervisor (vs. 7% of the general population).

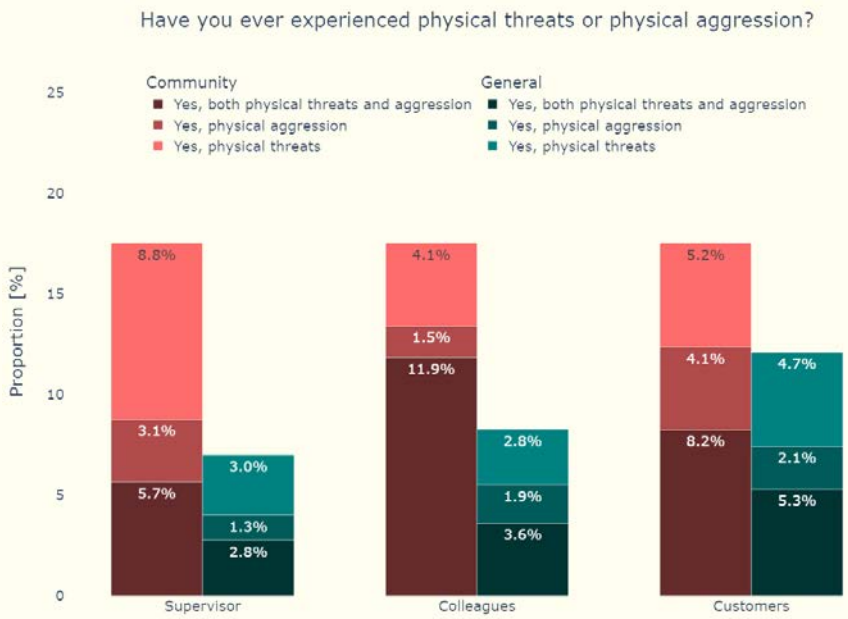


Figure 14: Proportion of participants who have been threated, physically attacked or both by supervisors, colleagues, or by customers for the Community (N= 194) versus the General population (N=471)

Amongst our interviewees, about the same proportion (2 out of 10) experienced some form of physical aggression at their workplace. In one instance, Natalie, a teacher in a high school described a colleague following her out of the staff lounge after a debate amongst the staff about Canadian Mounties being permitted to wear turbans as part of their uniform. Her colleague was expressing consternation over the uniform being changed after all these years, and Natalie pushed back to state that it was nice to see government entities were changing their uniforms to be more inclusive. According to Natalie, her colleague then started arguing with her, so Natalie decided to walk away and leave the staff lounge. Her colleague followed her down the hallway yelling comments like, “If you Muslims are so misunderstood, why don’t you go to the media and state your piece?” Natalie kept walking and her colleague kept following her. Natalie reported feeling physically intimidated and bullied and reported the incident to the principal.

Another interview respondent, Sarah, who works in retail, went into detail about a specific incident with a man who accosted her with racist remarks and threats of physical violence directed at her hijab while she was working at the kiosk:

"This gentleman came to attack me verbally. He threatened to fire me. He told me that we would no longer be able to wear it [hijab] because Marine Le Pen[46] is going to ban it. I told him that we are not in France. He told me that he was going to...force me to remove it. He left when he realized my indifference. He came back to tell me that he would force me to show my identity. He told me that I was a submissive woman, submissive to Islam. Towards the end, two witnesses intervened."

After the incident, her employer sent an email to all staff letting other employees know about the incident, informing them that Sarah was okay, and commending Sarah for her professionalism in staying calm throughout the incident. However, the employer never reached out to Sarah personally to ask if she was indeed okay or if she needed any further support. Sarah was not surprised with this inadequate response as she had witnessed unchecked racist remarks in her work group chats where, for example, one of her supervisors complained that the company was "recruiting too many Arabs."

Nature of remarks and threats

We also asked survey respondents to characterize the nature of the remarks and threats where we permitted them to select more than one characterization of the incident(s) they experienced. 67% of those who were subjected to these remarks or threats described them as Islamophobic, while 56% characterized them as racist in nature. The remaining were described as xenophobic, misogynistic, sexual harassment or other. Of the Muslim women who have had such hostile experiences at work, 38% described them as misogynistic or as sexual harassment, which aligns with the experiences of the general population where sexual harassment and misogyny characterized 37% of the experiences of workplace hostilities – speaking to broader problems of safety for women at work that further compounds Muslim women's experiences.

The chart below helps visualize the differences in experiences between the Muslim women in Québec and the general population. For example, higher percentages along certain axes indicate that the Muslims surveyed report specific types of threats or remarks more than those reported by the general population.

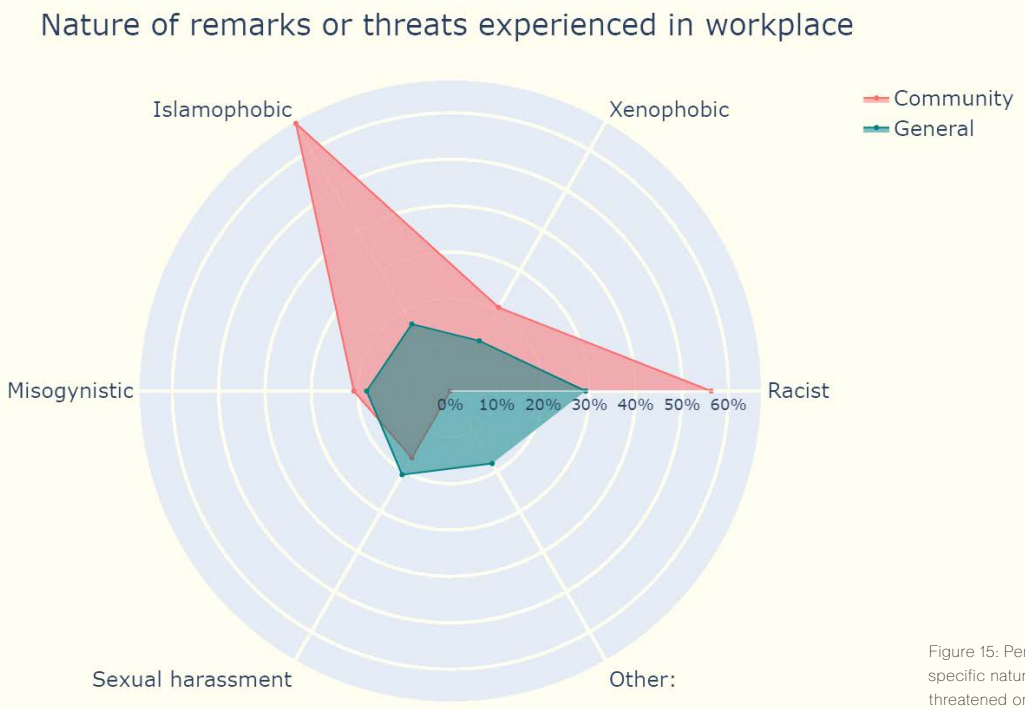


Figure 15: Percentage of participants reporting remarks of specific nature among those who reported being physically threatened or attacked in their workplaces. This is the case of the community (N=48) versus the general (N=72) population

Career Advancement

Beyond the increasingly hostile and alienating work environments, the Muslim women we surveyed also reported experiencing impacts on their career trajectories and incomes. Given that employees seldom have full transparency in how employers make decisions about advancement opportunities in workplaces, we framed our questions to ask how survey respondents felt about their status in the workplace. Whether they could prove it or not, 41% of Muslim women surveyed felt that they were disadvantaged in advancement opportunities relative to non-Muslim colleagues due to their religious identity. 1 in 3 (33%) Muslim women surveyed felt like they were denied a promotion or advancement due to their religion and 1 in 4 (25%) felt that their religion has newly come up in conversations about promotions or other career advancement opportunities (vs. 5% of the general population surveyed) since Bill 21 became law.

In addition, 16% of Muslim women surveyed who are currently employed report that their income has decreased in the period since Bill 21 became law (vs. 3 % of the general population), which raises concerns about their financial futures.

Work environment

What can collegiality look like when facing these types of questions and comments from co-workers? The experiences with colleagues and supervisors that the women we interviewed recounted illustrate the urgent need for addressing workplace cultures that allow such racist and Islamophobic remarks and actions to go unchecked.

The survey responses of the Muslim women who participated in the study also indicate that there have been significant shifts in their overall work environments since the passage of Bill 21. Half of the Muslim women we surveyed (51%) felt that their religion came up in conversations at work more often than before Bill 21 came into effect. Nearly a third (29%) felt that their colleagues treated them differently and another one-third (34%) felt alienated or ostracized at work since Bill 21 became law, compared with 5% and 4% of the general population sample, respectively.

One of the teachers we interviewed, Kelly, described a great sense of confusion and scrutiny after the passage of Bill 21 that focused on her place at school as a hijab-wearing teacher. Though Kelly was grandfathered into her teaching position, her colleagues and students asked her if she was allowed to work there anymore. Kelly expressed a feeling of her authority as a teacher being undermined by Bill 21 as students began to question her right to be in the school. Salama, a teacher who completed her placement at a public school decided in the end to leave the sector because, as she put it, “I know I’m not going to be treated well and they won’t accept me after [the passage of Bill 21].”

V.
Covid-19 Impact

COVID-19 pandemic measures in Québec included lockdowns, curfews, mandatory masking, personal protective equipment, vaccinations and more. While this period saw a rise in racism, Islamophobia and hate (as has been widely reported),[47] our survey also found seemingly paradoxical employment experiences amongst Muslim women in Québec.

Pandemic measures in Québec

Less than a year after Bill 21 became law, Québec experienced a series of epidemiological events and implemented corresponding public health measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. After the first reported case in February 2020, the government took action, like many other jurisdictions, to implement isolation requirements and a prohibition on gatherings of over 250 people. Subsequently, a state of emergency was declared by the Government of Québec, leading to more rigorous measures, including the suspension of court activities, the closure of schools, daycares and various public facilities like training centers and entertainment venues. Additionally, travel restrictions and physical distancing were enforced, and remote work was strongly encouraged.

Some of these measures were temporarily relaxed during the summer, such as the reopening of essential businesses and schools, but they were subsequently reinstated in response to the onset of the second wave, which commenced in August 2020. This resurgence led to the introduction of the mandatory wearing of masks in public places and, soon after, a curfew was implemented.

Various public health initiatives remained in force throughout 2022 and 2023. Notably, in September 2022, the vaccination passport system was introduced to regulate access to specific locations and events. There was a gradual easing of restrictions until June 2023. The obligation to wear a face mask was progressively lifted in various public settings, with the announcement in June 2023 marking the cessation of mandatory mask-wearing on public transportation,

marking the end of the obligation.[48]

Studies have shown the uneven and racialized impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, from discrepancies in vaccinations, to a rise in hate and racism, to the further marginalization of already marginalized communities. This study seeks to examine the nuances of the impacts on Muslim women's employment experiences in Québec.

Impact on Muslim Women

As may be expected, many Muslim women surveyed reported that COVID-19 measures made it more difficult for them to search for a job (26%) or to do their job (28%), which roughly aligns with the experiences of the general population (26% and 34% respectively). However, nearly a quarter (24%) of Muslim women we surveyed who were looking for a job said that COVID-19 measures made it easier for them to look for a job. This was six times more than the general population where 4% found it easier to look for a job while pandemic measures were in place. In addition, 27% of Muslim women found that pandemic measures made it easier for them to do their jobs, compared to 16% of the general population.

As pandemic measures are being lifted and many workplaces are returning to work in-person, some of our interviewees also raised concerns about a return to normalized levels of racism and Islamophobia that they face as visibly Muslim women.[49]

Fitting in

Some of our interview respondents spoke to their experiences at work and in search of employment while pandemic measures were in place as a temporary feeling of fitting in. Salama, who wears a niqab, explained that she perceived a significant change in the way she was treated in public and at work when mandatory masking measures were in place. She described navigating public spaces to get to work as a niqab-wearing woman prior to the mask mandates as follows: "I needed so much confidence, so much more energy to just go out...I was always looked at and people commented a lot." After mask mandates were in place, she said that she noticed "a lot of people were...smiling, using positive comments. So I just felt very happy and I didn't have to think so much before going outside."

Dunia described her experience in a healthcare setting a little differently. She said that the intensity of the moment felt like a "war effort...everyone was important, no matter who you were." Referring to the infamous photograph of Premier Francois Legault (the mastermind behind Bill 21) receiving his first vaccine from a hijab-wearing healthcare worker, Dunia said "I found it so ironic. Jobs are denied to so many women like her, but since you need her right now, that's okay?" While Dunia's experience may be unique to the healthcare sector, it points to the lack of integrity and ethics underpinning Bill 21.

PHOTO BY GRAHAM HUGHES /The Canadian Press

In/visibility

Amongst the women we interviewed, there was a temporary sense of respite brought about by measures such as remote working arrangements for many. Sofia, who wears a hijab and works in government services described how the "distance" meant that she got fewer questions about her religious identity and microaggressions when at work: "If you are not seen, there is no longer a problem." But she pointed out that she understood this relief was temporary. She went on to say that she preferred to have people ask her questions face-to-face so that she can dispel myths and prevent co-workers from cultivating harmful stereotypes. Natalie also spoke of the relief that pandemic measures brought about for her in the education sector as she had fewer in-person interactions, but she also felt a sense of relief because the media preoccupation with pandemic reporting "took everybody's mind off" Muslim women for at least a while. As Maryam put it,

> **“Yes, it’s sad to say, but it took a global pandemic to breathe a little.”**

These findings echo the growing body of work on the nuances of racialized impacts of COVID-19 and pandemic measures, but they also provide unique insights into the experiences of visibly Muslim women more specifically. In addition, these findings raise concerns about how the visibility of minority populations unduly overshadows job competency and brings into further focus the myth of meritocratic work environments. Relatedly, these findings also indicate that prejudicial responses to visible differences are an enduring challenge in workplaces, raising concerns about the transition back to working in person that many employers are pursuing.

VI.
Social and Emotional Well-being

The previous sections detailed insidious consequences of the passing of Bill 21 on Muslim women in their workplaces as well as when they are searching for employment in Québec. This section examines an important corollary of these findings – the impact on social and emotional well-being. Contrary to the claims of the CAQ government, our findings suggest that Bill 21 is leading to challenges to integration, social disharmony, and the ghettoization of a minority population. Moreover, our findings lead to concerns that the discord sown by Bill 21 into the social fabric of Québec will also have economic impacts for the province.

Sense of belonging

For many women we surveyed and interviewed, a shaken sense of belonging featured prominently in their responses to questions about mental health. Out of the 411 Muslim women we surveyed, a staggering 88% felt that Québec was a less welcoming place to live because of Bill 21, and 90% felt that Québec was a less welcoming place to work (with 67% saying that it was much less welcoming). A notable portion of the general population sample we surveyed also felt the same, with 24% reporting that they felt that Québec was a less welcoming place to live because of Bill 21 and 25% reporting that they felt that Québec was a less welcoming place to work.

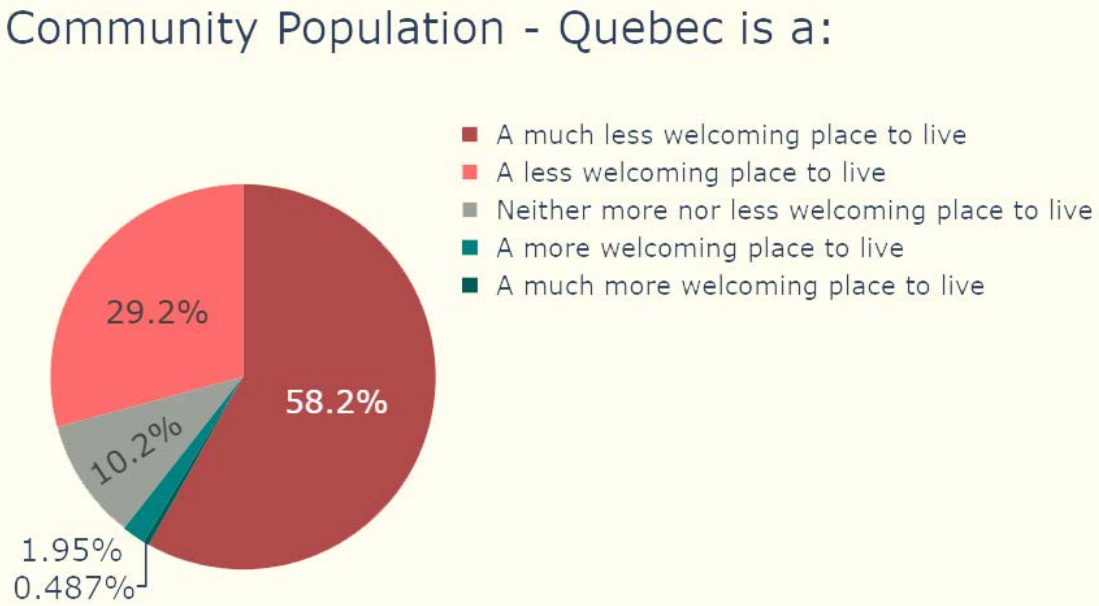


Figure 16: Community respondents answer to question: "Do you feel like Bill 21 has made the province of Québec…". N = 411

Second class citizens

For many of the Muslim women we interviewed, this shaken sense of belonging was due to their experience of being treated like "second-class citizens," as Meriam put it. Kelly, another teacher who wears a hijab but was grandfathered in her position, described feeling degraded due to Bill 21: "I graduated [with] numerous awards and scholarships, graduated with distinction...but then you are being told you're not qualified because you wear something on your head...you are being punished." Others echoed this sense of exasperation at what they thought should be a meritocratic process and the double standards Muslim women must bear.

Alongside being made to feel like second-class citizens, the amplification of othering after the passage of Bill 21 was notable for many of the women we interviewed. Speaking about her experiences in school environments, Salama, a teacher by training who wears a niqab and was unable to secure a permanent position in the public school system said, "Yes, I think people feel uncomfortable because you are different, you dress differently, you maybe go to pray... you don't practice the same maybe holidays. You're just different...you don't belong here."

Second class citizens

Relatedly, the passing of Bill 21 marked a turning point in the sense of belonging for many of the women we interviewed because of what they perceived to be the legitimization of Islamophobia and racism by the government, and the subsequent onslaught of racist and Islamophobic remarks and attacks with impunity. As Maryam put it, it was "as if they had a license to be racist." Salama also noted how the public environment more broadly began to shift after Bill 62 was passed, and how the passage of Bill 21 seemed like the cementing of a new reality for Muslim women. Referring to her reaction to the passage of Bill 21, she said, "I was like wow the government is attacking me...then I felt this is not like a minority, this is like a majority accepting this." Dunia, a healthcare worker, shared Salama's sentiments about the legitimization and normalization of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in the aftermath of the passage of Bill 21:

"You always feel the looks, the judgement. But after [Bill 21], it seems to have become more legitimate. It becomes legitimate because we passed a law that tells us that we [Muslim women] are not accepted in certain sectors. It also influences areas other than education...Bill 21 came to further marginalize people who were already subject to a lot of prejudice, in this case, women who wear the hijab. It also normalizes the fact of having these prejudices, it legitimizes them!"

Similarly, Meriam noted this legitimization and normalization through the passage of Bill 21 is what makes the climate of Islamophobia and racism in Québec exceptional: "In any province, in any country, there are people who are racist, who are gonna, you know, think of you differently, look at you weird. But when it's the law, it just legitimizes it. So that changes things."

All of the women we interviewed described at least one Islamophobic experience in a public space since Bill 21 became law, from bus drivers not letting them on the bus, to public harassment in parking lots, to being subjected to physical violence by strangers on public transit, to being spat on while walking down a sidewalk. Many of the interviewees understood these incidents to be a consequence of heightened Islamophobia and, as described above, the official legitimization of anti-Muslim hostilities engendered by Bill 21. As Sarah, a retail worker, put it,

> **"Bill 21 has clearly made people uninhibited about their racist views."**

Gender Equality

Many of the Muslim women we interviewed were also keenly aware of the gendered dimensions of the Islamophobia and racism amplified by Bill 21. Soundous, a teacher who wanted to become a principal but was grandfathered into her position, expressed her disappointment in the unfulfilled promise of women's rights when it comes to Muslim women. In her conceptualization of Québec national identity and culture, women's rights were front and centre and, in fact, she placed significant value on the culture of aspiring for gender equality in Québec. However, she expressed that she did not expect the intersectional oppression of her rights as a Muslim woman would come to be institutionalized in a law like Bill 21. She put it this way: "Already, as a woman, I didn't feel very well treated. When it comes to wages and working conditions. But then, as a Muslim woman, it is even more accentuated after Law 21. So, there is like a double discrimination that takes place." Kelly also noted that as a Muslim woman, she felt frustrated that she and others like her were left out of the decision-making process around Bill 21, even though it impacted them the most: "it feels like a lot of decisions are being made by people who have no involvement whatsoever in the people living these lives."

It is not surprising then that the survey data shows that a high proportion of the women we surveyed feel alienated and ostracized as Muslim women.

Future outlook

The future outlook for visibly Muslim women in Québec appears uncertain and fraught with concerns, as evidenced by the sentiments expressed by participants. A staggering 73% of surveyed Muslim women voiced apprehensions about what lies ahead, underscoring the profound impact of Bill 21 on their aspirations and sense of belonging in the province.

Several women we interviewed mentioned that their future outlook was greatly affected by fears of escalating discrimination and the spectre of further legislative measures targeting their religious expression. The fear that Québec may follow in the footsteps of jurisdictions like France, where religious freedoms are increasingly restricted, loomed large in their minds. As Dunia mentioned, “I think about the fact that if I was in France, I wouldn’t even have been able to go to university with my hijab. Who knows how far we will go with Bill 21. It could become the same thing in Québec.” While some of the women we interviewed maintained hope for a positive future in Québec, many expressed profound anxieties and sleepless nights plagued by worries over Bill 21’s implications and the safety of their families.

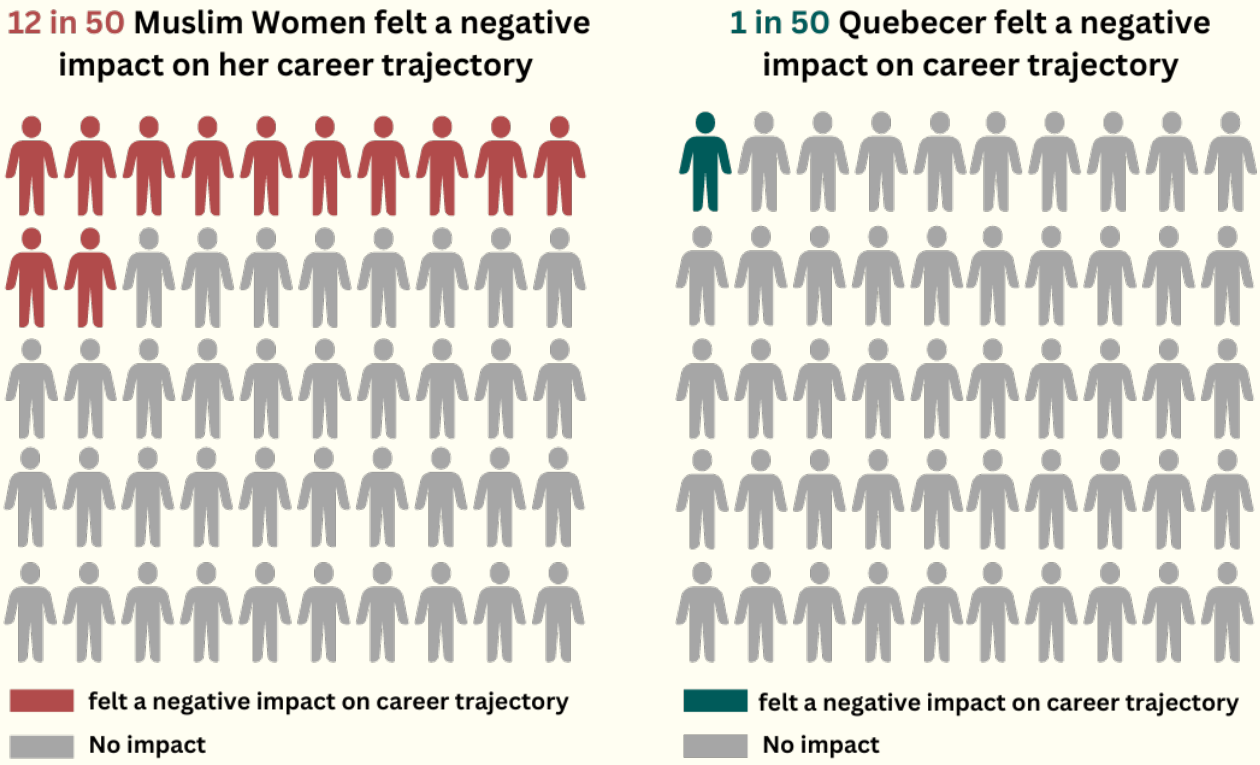
These testimonies collectively paint a sobering picture of the challenges faced by visibly Muslim women in Québec, prompting many to reconsider their future within the province amidst growing tensions and legislative barriers to their full participation in society.

Career Derailment

While some women reported positive trajectories such as promotions (9%), there was a chronic sense of hopelessness plaguing many participants, which was produced by the derailment or stagnation of their career trajectories. Sentiments of hopelessness pervade the experiences of many visibly Muslim women in Québec, casting a shadow over their career prospects for the future. With a significant portion of respondents (39%) expressing feelings of hopelessness following the enactment of Bill 21, the impact of discriminatory legislation is palpable.

For many of the women we interviewed, this sense of hopelessness was in part driven by experiences of career derailment, as their career choices narrowed or became entirely unavailable because of Bill 21. 25% of women who experienced change in their career since June 2019 said that their career trajectory was negatively impacted by Bill 21. In addition, a significant number of women we surveyed felt that Bill 21 had negatively impacted their income, with 17% reporting a decrease in income due to the law.

As a result of Bill 21



Kelly, a teacher and convert to Islam, articulated a profound sense of disillusionment, describing how despite being born and raised in Canada and excelling in her endeavours, she feels marginalized in her career path solely because of her beliefs and attire. She explained:

"It just feels like a slap in the face… You do everything you're supposed to do, you go to school, you do well, you do just as well or better than your peers in your school… But then just because of what you believe…you're not allowed [to work]."

Sarah, similarly, grappled with the notion of being perceived as an outsider in her own home, compounded by the discriminatory implications of Bill 21. She explained,

"I already had difficulty projecting myself in relation to my future, and Bill 21 added restrictions. It was a big source of stress. Why others have access to certain positions and I don't? If the restrictions applied to everyone, it would be more understandable, but this is only aimed at women like me...They made me understand that they didn't want me and that they hated me. It affected me strongly."

Natalie and Soundous, both teachers in public schools, described how they felt constrained by the grandfather clause, and mourned their loss of agency to pursue their aspirations to become school principals. Natalie described how she was encouraged from early in her career to pursue a path towards becoming a principal because, according to her colleagues and supervisors, she "thinks like an administrator." But this opportunity abruptly became unavailable to her as Bill 21 became law and the grandfather clause prohibited her from moving from her current position. As Soundous put it,

> **"Before Bill 21, I had the freedom to dream like my colleagues."**

Similarly for Meriam and Salama, upon realizing that they would not be able to pursue a career in education – something they both were deeply passionate about and had invested considerable time in – they were forced to change their career paths and go back to school to re-train in an effort to take their careers in a different direction. For others, their dreams were brought to a halt before they even pursued them, such as Sarah who had a plan in mind but found herself "having to choose between my religion and my career" after Bill 21 became law. Several other interviewees echoed this experience of Bill 21 exerting considerable influence over their career decisions . Maryam, a medical resident, for instance, was considering a career in law but decided not to pursue it. She stuck to medicine due to the limitations imposed by Bill 21.

The legislation not only imposes professional limitations for many of the women who participated in the study, but, as the experiences of Muslim women we interviewed make clear, it also fosters perceptions of a deep-seated feeling of rejection and animosity towards visibly Muslim women. These accounts poignantly illustrate the psychological fear and distress of systemic discrimination, perpetuating a cycle of hopelessness and disillusionment among visibly Muslim women in Québec, who are left to navigate a landscape rife with barriers against their full participation in society.

Intergenerational aspirations and traumas

While many of the women we interviewed reflected on their feelings of alienation, they also spoke about how they felt Québec was their home. A sense of melancholy was thus expressed over what was happening to this home. Dunia expressed this as becoming alienated "by my own country" and Meriam described it as feeling like she belonged "a little less," but was not ready just yet to give up calling Québec her "home." When asked if she felt like she still belonged in Québec, Soundous replied, " It's complicated to answer this question because when I arrived in Québec, despite the fact that I left my family and my roots, I felt at home right away."

These torn sentiments about "home" are symptomatic of both the intergenerational aspirations and the traumas that many Muslim women we interviewed carry with them. Maryam, a medical resident, stated: "Sometimes I wonder if I want to have children who will grow up in this climate. I don't want them to have to go through what I went through". This speaks to the profound intergenerational trauma of systemic discrimination, highlighting the hesitancy to subject future generations to similar traumas. Meriam's reflections on the enduring impact of Bill 21 on public institutions echo this sentiment. She argued:

> **…as long as this law exists, there will never be a public school where a teacher with a hijab will walk in the hallways…there will never be a public school where the principal wears a hijab. There will never be a court of law where the judge will be wearing a hijab. I just think that just feeds into the misconceptions that exist about us, and we're fighting so hard to erase those. There's going to be generations of kids who will get all of their information about Muslims through the media….it'll be a never ending cycle as long as this law exists.**

In other words, the perpetuation of misconceptions and barriers imposed by Bill 21 underscores the cyclical nature of discrimination that future generations may inherit and the enduring struggle for equity and inclusion. Kelly spoke to that by sharing her apprehensions about the limitations her children might face in accessing education due to discriminatory legislation. She suggests, "If my own kids… want to go in education…you'd have to be the bearer of bad news and be like, well, you know, you wouldn't be able to wear your hijab there if you chose to do that."

A consistent sentiment we found in our interviews was the confounding tension between the intergenerational aspirations for a better life, juxtaposed with the harsh reality of systemic discrimination. Intertwined with these narratives is the reflection of immigrant journeys, as articulated by Meriam, who spoke to the hopes and challenges inherent in the process of integration. "I feel like as an immigrant, when you integrate, it's because you want to, you want to make some aspects of your life a little easier…But I think it's just extra hurtful when you feel like you don't, you can't…have access to your fundamental rights, you don't have equal opportunities". Maryam also described her family's experiences in Tunisia where her mother was

being forced to unveil, and the heartbreaking reality of her mother having to face the same sentiments decades later in Québec where she had chosen to move for more freedom and a better life for her children.

Several of the women we interviewed also described traumatic childhood experiences of witnessing their immigrant parents being attacked for their Muslim identities, but staying in Québec despite those attacks because they believed that their children would fare better as they invested in their education and economic well-being. Natalie described witnessing her father being dragged out of his car in a parking lot and beaten to a "bloody pulp" while being called racist slurs when she was a child. Salama recalled several incidents of her neighbours repeatedly harassing her family in their childhood home because they were visibly Muslim, which culminated in one of her neighbours barging into their house wielding a knife and threatening them, destroying their bookshelf that housed their Islamic library and smashing their car. Several other women described similar childhood memories of witnessing their mothers wearing a hijab being attacked, being spoken to "like they were garbage" at the grocery store, or being spat on when walking down the street. Yet they all remained in Québec despite these traumatic experiences because, as Natalie put it, they thought that "discrimination was the price of citizenship." But they had hope that the next generation will be more secure, and treated fairly because by then, the hope was, Muslims would have become better known and, consequently, more accepted. For many women we interviewed, the escalation of Islamophobia over the last few years and the shattering of this intergenerational aspiration through Bill 21 was a painful reality.

Mental Health

It is worth noting, though not surprising that awareness of Bill 21 in general was significantly higher amongst Muslim women surveyed (90%) than members of the general population (52%). Bill 21 thus weighed heavily on the consciousness of Muslim women in Québec. In our surveys and interviews, we asked respondents to tell us about the impacts of Bill 21 and the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental health.

Interestingly, when asked about overall mental health, a majority of survey respondents (74%) and interviewees alike reported that their mental health was average or better when asked broad questions about mental health. However, when asked about specific concerns impacting mental health, the data trended towards declining or poor mental health. Three quarters (73%) of our survey respondents expressed concern about the future with a considerable portion experiencing mistrust towards the government (64%), stress (54%), and a sense of hopelessness (39%). Additionally, a significant majority (64%) indicated that Bill 21 has adversely affected their well-being. Interestingly, despite these challenges, only a minority have sought (13%), or have considered seeking (16%), support from mental health professionals.

Sense of Safety

The experiences of the women we interviewed indicate that the overall sense of safety of Muslim women in Québec was challenged in multiple ways after the passage of Bill 21. Many suggested that Bill 21 had poisoned the social and political climate in a way that they had never experienced before. The women we interviewed echoed the mistrust of the government, and concomitant sense of paranoia, that we found in our survey respondents. Referring to when the CAQ came to power, Sophia, who works in the public service put it this way:

“There was a climate of hatred. We all know what happened at the mosque of Québec. My children are in a Muslim school here and I’m even more worried. You have to be more careful than the others because I don’t want anyone to be able to enter the school. We are more at risk”.

This uneasiness and anxiety were corroborated by other participants, such as Soundous, a teacher in the French education system, who explained, “I worry about my daughter and my peers who take public transportation.” In fact, fear and worry in public spaces was a recurring theme with all the women interviewed. It was brought up by Sarah, a retail worker, who said,

“I’m terrified of the subway. I can’t go near the tracks for fear that someone will come from behind and push me. It has become a reflex. I am very careful in the metro. I look around me and identify potential risks of danger…I imagine scenarios where an old gentleman pulls my veil. I imagine being touched out of curiosity. I imagine someone touching my veil and wondering why I’m wearing it. I imagine that there is hatred behind these gestures. It makes me question…it gives me thoughts that I never thought I would have.”

Dunia, a healthcare worker, provided a concrete example of how that hypervigilance permeates day-to-day activities:

“I don’t know if I’m paranoid. But, no, it’s not paranoia. I was with a veiled girl, and we wanted to cross the street. She said, hurry before someone knocks us down. We all laughed but it was a fake laugh. It is something that constantly occupies our thoughts. We are always on the lookout. We are visible targets because of our hijab.”

With the passing of Bill 21, the increased climate of Islamophobia further deteriorated Muslim women’s feelings of safety. Meriam shared deep feelings of desperation and contemplating compromising on her identity and values after Bill 21 became law – a feeling that was further exacerbated by the 2021 fatal Islamophobic attack on a Muslim family in London, Ontario. She explained:

“That was a turning point for me in my life. I contemplated taking off the hijab. For one week after it happened, I could not cry, I was shocked, I would stare into space and just think about, you know, this is becoming a life-threatening piece of cloth that I’m wearing now. Is it worth it?…Is it worth my life? … I would go on walks, trying to clear my head, trying to feel better. And I would see a pickup truck and I would get scared, is it gonna run me over you know?”

This echoes the hypervigilance mentioned by Dunia. Notably, Dunia also referred to the political and social situation in Iran related to the killing of Mahsa Amini and subsequent backlash on Muslim communities, as impacting her sense of safety in the province. She "didn't go out for three days for fear of stares". She continued by saying that "We already had a lot of difficulties, but it got worse with the context of women in Iran, [because] people were even more reinforced in their idea that the hijab is a sign of oppression". Several women we interviewed spoke similarly about how the pressure on Muslim women in Québec to reaffirm their agency and freedom of choice in wearing the hijab further deteriorated their sense of safety as it made them feel targeted.

There is no surprise that this constant fear, worry and hyperawareness has had a detrimental effect on Muslim women's mental well-being. The survey further corroborates these findings, as 64% of respondents agree that 'the adoption of Bill 21 has had a negative impact on their mental well-being'.

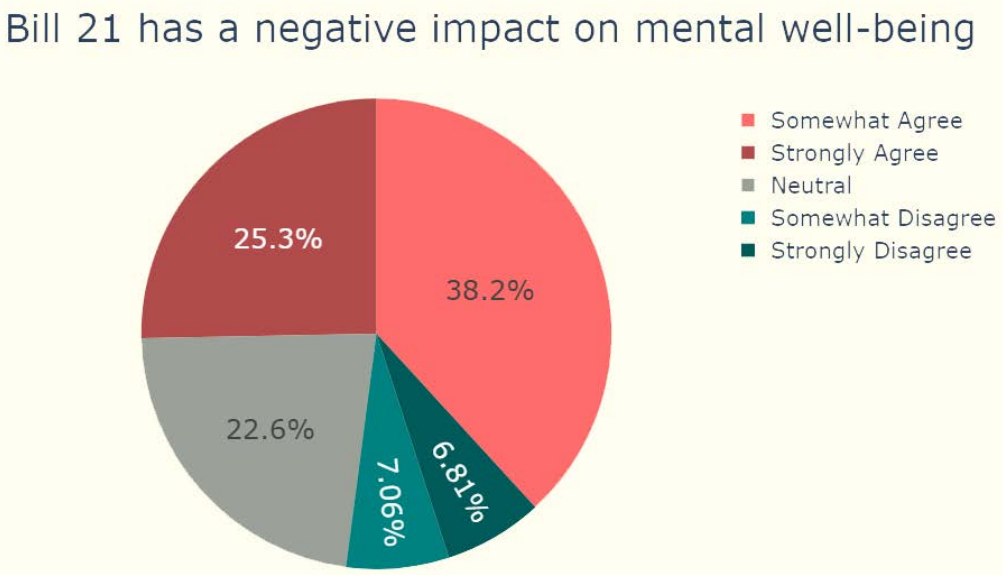


Figure 17: Community respondents answer to question: "Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: The adoption of Bill 21 has had a negative impact on my overall mental well-being". N = 411

Pressure of representation

The pressure of representation was palpable in the accounts of all the women interviewed, highlighting a recurring challenge faced by visibly Muslim women in Québec. As visible minorities, they bear an additional burden, significantly impacting their mental health and overall well-being. This burden arises from the incessant pressure to embody perfection in all aspects of their lives to mitigate Islamophobia and racist stereotypes projected onto them. Sophia, a government worker, compared that feeling to being a "woman in an office full of men in their fifties, you feel out of place and you have additional pressure." Dunia underscored that senti-

ment by saying that "you have to be more competent…I have to perform at work. If I give them the opportunity to blame me for something, they will. If I do my job impeccably, they will have nothing to say." Dunia's remarks highlight that she felt that any misstep could be unfairly attributed to her identity.

Maryam, a healthcare worker, drawing from personal experience, shared the weight of wearing the hijab in the current Québec climate, and added the feeling of being burdened by the perception that she represents the entire Muslim community:

"My dad always says the hijab is like a flag. I've always hated that definition, but it's the reality. A woman who wears the hijab, everyone associates her with Islam. I didn't tell myself that I was going to represent the entire Muslim community when I chose to wear the hijab."

Despite the exhaustion of constantly explaining herself, she recognized the importance of standing firm against discrimination to pave the way for future generations.

"If I don't stand firm in the face of discrimination against veiled women and end up taking it off under pressure, it will just be worse for the next women who want to wear it. If I take it off, I'm not helping anyone. If I keep it and work with it, people will understand that we are good people…But it's a very big pressure."

Natalie, a teacher in an English School Board, echoed these sentiments, acknowledging the relentless effort required to exceed expectations and affirm her humanity, both professionally and personally. She explained that "you have to go above and beyond to prove yourself. And it's not just proving yourself professionally, it's proving yourself personally."

Interestingly, some participants saw their visibility as an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and advocate for their community's needs at decision-making tables. They recognized the importance of ensuring their voices were heard in discussions surrounding policies that directly impacted them and their community. However, this proactive stance often came at a personal cost, resulting in increased workload and bearing the burden of this mental load. Another one of our interviewees described feeling compelled to take on more responsibilities within her union to address the lack of representation, particularly for Muslim teachers and students affected by the law. Despite the additional workload, she viewed her efforts as a necessary step towards effecting change for future generations: "It's a step for change, even if I'm not really doing it for myself, I'm doing it for the new generation. I think it's important". Similarly, Meriam, a teacher in an English school, emphasized the significance of representation in educational settings. Recounting how her presence as a hijab-wearing teacher positively impacted students who saw themselves reflected in her, she said: "We had two kids in the school who were brothers. And when I spoke to their mom, she was the only mother in the school who wore a hijab. And she was telling me how happy her kids were when I started working there. When they saw me in the hallway, they would tell their mom excitedly that there's a teacher who wears a hijab. And I think these things really matter, you know?"

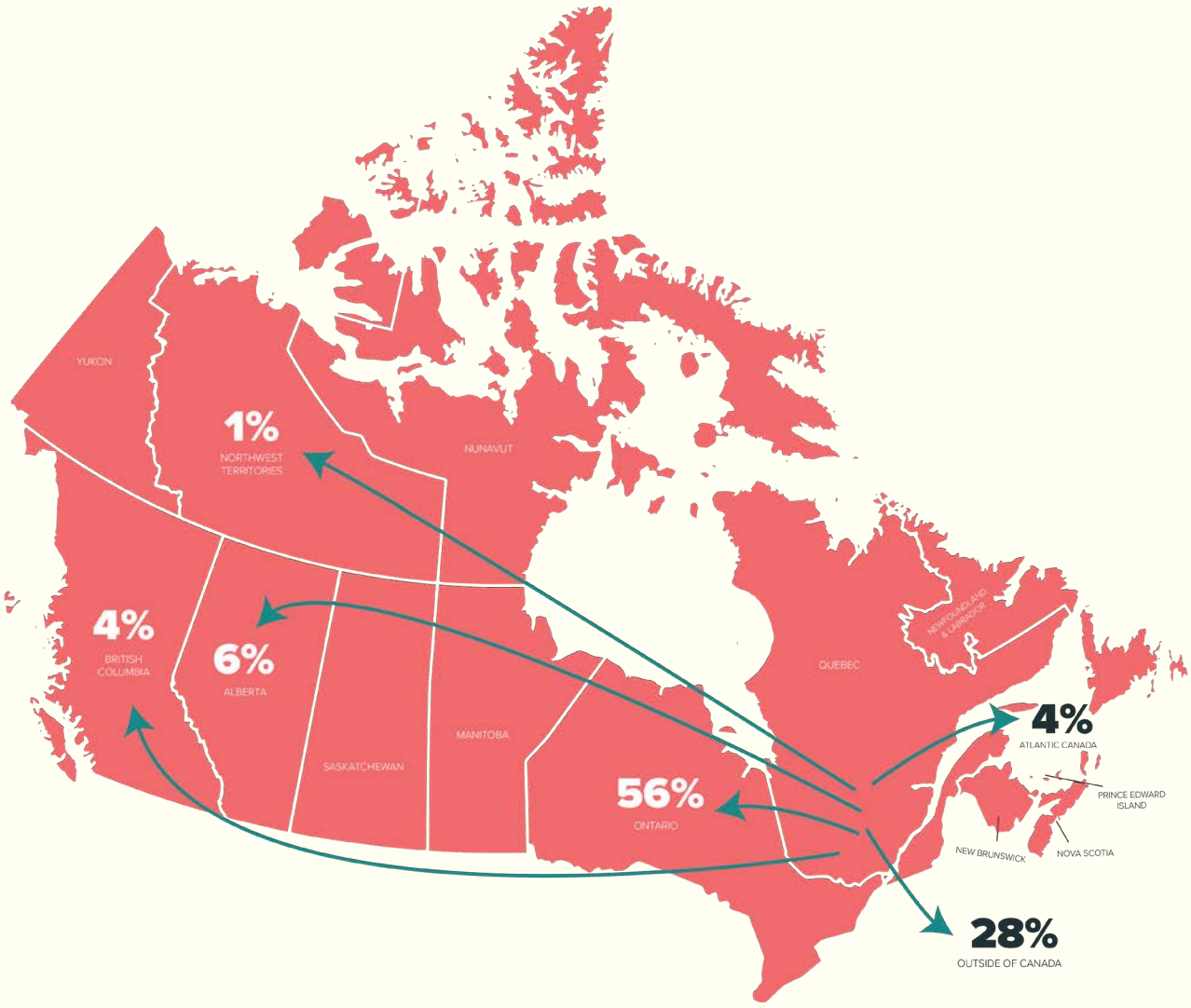
VII. Strategies of Survival and Resistance

The previous sections of this report provide some important insights about the everyday lives of Muslim women in Québec as they navigate the employment landscape since the passage of Bill 21. It is not surprising that many Muslim women reported that their sense of belonging in Québec has been deeply impacted since Bill 21 became law. Nevertheless, the Muslim women we surveyed and interviewed indicated that they were employing a variety of strategies of survival and resistance that speak to their resilience in the face of a rapidly evolving social and political climate that is characterized by state-sponsored discrimination and related public discourse where Muslim women often become proverbial punching bags. As one of our interviewees, Amal, put it, she felt that women in her community have built a "wall of resilience." In this section we explore the multi-faceted ways that Muslim women are managing the new realities brought on by the passage of Bill 21 and COVID-19, as well as the broader socio-economic impact of their choices.

Emigration

Muslim women are exploring their options. Our survey data shows that an alarmingly high number of Muslim women (including employed and unemployed) are considering or are planning to leave the province. 71% of Muslim women (vs. 9% of the general population surveyed) have considered leaving the province, among those are 70% of the francophone respondents and 75% of the anglophone respondents. Nearly three quarters of women surveyed (73%) have applied or are considering applying for work outside of Québec, among those are 71% of the francophone respondents and 82% of the anglophone respondents. According to conservative estimations of economic impact, this level of emigration of Muslim women from Québec's workforce represents an estimated $3.2 billion[50] in lost income for the province. This number is likely much higher as many women considering migrating will likely be leaving the province with their families which include additional income earners.

For the majority of Muslim women surveyed who are considering leaving Québec, Ontario is the destination of choice with 56% of Québec Muslim women surveyed reporting that they are considering moving there. 27% of Québec Muslim women surveyed are considering leaving the country altogether.



As mentioned, for many of the women we interviewed, the decision to stay in Québec or leave was fraught with conflicting feelings of Québec as their "home" alongside an alarming decline in their sense of belonging. Maryam, a healthcare worker described her feelings about moving as "special" because she considers Québec her home and prefers speaking in French, but she felt she was forced to keep the option of moving open because living in Québec made her "life difficult sometimes."

Uncertainty and fear rooted in the attitudes and actions of Québec's provincial government were central to how several women we interviewed were approaching their decision to stay or go. Salama, for instance, is planning on moving to Ontario in the near future. She explained that she took Bill 21 to be a sign of further entrenchment of Islamophobia that she had not thought was possible. Since Bill 21 impacted so many more people than Bill 62 (which primarily

impacted women who wear a niqab and was struck down), she was certain that it would not stand. Her disappointment in the Bill passing and the subsequent difficulty in combatting the law deeply shaped her fear that her future in Québec was in much bigger jeopardy than she had thought.

Similarly, Sarah, whose mother also wears a hijab, spoke at length about the "climate of tension" propelled and legitimized by the Québec government. She said they had been thinking about moving since the debates over Bill 62, but they saw the passage of Bill 21 as a "sign" that showed them that they are "not welcome in the province." She went on to elaborate, "When I saw that the CAQ was re-elected, I knew we were going to repeat the same cycle."

The Québec government loomed large even in the calculus for those who decided to stay as they had to assess if they could somehow mitigate the impact of Bill 21 on their livelihoods and everyday life. Soundous, for instance, works for the federal government and while she had considered moving out of the province after Bill 21 became law, she decided to stay because she is more comfortable speaking in French. Her decision to stay was influenced by her getting the position in the federal public service, where she felt more secure and less likely to be discriminated against due to her practice of wearing a hijab. She explained that she avoided applying for any positions in the provincial government for fear of the type of Islamophobia that was perpetuated by the provincial government during the debates on Bill 21 being directed at her.

As the survey findings and the interviews make clear, weighing the decision to move out of province or actually uprooting oneself to move out of province is disproportionately prevalent among Muslim women in Québec. While many women feel that this is the best path forward, it is important to note how conflicted several of our interviewees felt about considering moving, as well as how such a potentially high rate of emigration of Muslim women will impact the province.

Turning Inward

Relatedly, many of the Muslim women who participated in this study are also turning inwards and searching for employment within Muslim-owned businesses and community organizations. In search of alternatives to their current options and conditions of employment, two thirds (66%) of Muslim women we surveyed have also applied for, or are considering applying for, work within Muslim communities (Muslim-owned businesses, community organizations etc.).

This turn and the related shifts in Muslim women in the workforce bring to light the impact of Bill 21 on countering integration and leading to the ghettoization of minority communities. Several of the women we interviewed spoke about this choice as a matter of safety and survival. In all of their remarks, it was clear that the socio-economic climate produced by Bill 21 shaped their choices and forced them to consider options they had not considered before. One interviewee raised concerns that she had been hearing more and more women in her community considering the option of trying to find work within Muslim organizations. She was worried that this would mean that Muslims would become more "cut off" and, consequently, even more stigmatized in Québec.

Resistance

While many Muslim women in Québec are considering leaving the province, or turning inwards towards their religious communities for employment, our interview data indicates that Muslim women are also employing various strategies of resistance within their workplaces to change the conditions in which they find themselves. These strategies range from changing their own bodily comportment, to humour, to organizing within their workplaces and unions.

Embodied strategies of survival

For many, these strategies were borne out of the pressures of representation that we discussed in the previous section. For instance, a simple strategy that many women made an effort to employ was to smile more when they were in public spaces or at work, even when they didn't feel like it, in an attempt to dismantle preconceived ideas about Muslim women being unapproachable or unhappy. As Dunia, who works in a healthcare setting, explained: "I try to smile more and be more approachable to break down the prejudices against us." Others described making an extra effort to "dress really well" and "put on some makeup" in an attempt to fit in with normalized expectations of beauty.

There was also a trend of women developing self-preservation mechanisms. Maryam shed light on the anxiety of forming connections with individuals who harbour prejudiced views, opting instead to prioritize her sense of security over engaging in deeper interactions. She explained:

"If I know that people have certain problematic opinions about Muslims, about the hijab and about my reason for being, it becomes difficult to make connections… I won't be able to engage in different topics of conversation because I don't even feel comfortable existing next to this person."

Amal similarly spoke about her anxieties when she goes out in public as a hijab-wearing woman. She said:

"when I go to IGA with the veil…I don't look at people like right in the eye, because if I look at them, I might get something I don't like…maybe I'll get [somebody] who doesn't like hijabis or [something] like this, so I stopped looking at people… it sounds very sick. But it is what it is."

To cope, it became preferable for Amal to adopt defensive behaviours like avoiding eye contact to shield herself from anticipated animosity.

Others described using humour such as making fun of their own hijab or their other religious practices in order to preempt Islamophobic comments from colleagues and "make everyone feel more comfortable." Sophia, for instance, emphasized the role of humor in externalizing and mitigating fears, utilizing laughter as a means of coping with discomfort and uncertainty. As she put it, "I think people get scared. Then humour, it helps to exteriorize fears and then to appease them a little. I think humor does that. I tend to take things with humor and probably make fun of myself and make jokes." Similarly, when discussing more painful topics, Meriam admitted "I laugh in the face of adversity. So don't take this as a sign of like, this is funny. No, it's not funny. I'm laughing because that's just my coping mechanism or defense mechanism."

A few of our interviewees also described adjusting the style of their hijab when they go to work in an attempt to mitigate unwanted attention. Amal described how she tried to navigate mostly virtual recruitment processes in the banking sector by taking off her hijab if she knew the interviewer was going to be a woman, or wearing her hijab like a "turban" so it is less visible over an online video call. Dunia similarly talked about wearing her hijab as a turban:

"I wear the hjab in the form of a turban [at work]. I know it arouses less reaction than the hijab. Its very different. Even though they know I wear hijab in everyday life. I wear a turban [at work] because it gets less eyeballs. I wear a turtleneck to hide my neck as well."

In a similar vein, a few of our interviewees also described putting a hoodie over their hijab when they were in public to make their hijab less visible, with one of them remarking that she really appreciates it when the cold weather comes around so she can employ this strategy more frequently.

These strategies speak to the lengths Muslim women feel they must go to in response to the heightened scrutiny of their bodily choices, such as what they wear, as they go about their everyday lives.

Speaking out

Many of the women we interviewed also employed more direct forms of resistance such as organizing against Islamophobia and racism within their workplaces or speaking out within their communities, in media, or testifying in court. As one of the women we interviewed put it, "if you don't step up, no one will."

For those organizing within their workplaces, starting conversations about Islamophobia and racism was central to their strategies of shifting the discourse and making their sectors safer for themselves and for future generations of Muslims and other racial and religious minorities. Amal, for instance, highlighted the value of vocalizing experiences as a means of gaining insight and building resilience. She postulated that "When you speak about it and when you vocalize things, it actually is very insightful because it's like, oh, well, maybe this is not the way to think, or maybe this is not considered normal, but I've normalized things." Soundous, who took a more organized and active approach to combatting Islamophobia in her workplace, explained her reasons for speaking out as follows:

" I think we have to stay in Québec because I still believe that we can change things. I still believe that we can change the prevailing discourse. I still believe we are having an impact. If only for our children, if only for the future generation. When I say our children, I'm not talking about Muslim children only. If we look at the polls, the new generation is not in favour of Law 21. They are young people who have lived with other Muslims. They know who they really are. There is a cause worth fighting for in Québec."

Dunia described efforts by Muslim women and allies to organize and mobilize as empowering: "I know that in Québec the fact of mobilizing has helped us a lot. It may not have changed much, but it helped us to express what we felt...It's a way of strengthening the community." One of our interview respondents explained how she worked to institutionalize an anti-racism committee within her union in the education sector, in an effort to bring about systemic changes related to Islamophobia, racism, and anti-Indigenous discrimination. Similarly, another respondent, who also worked in the education sector, described her efforts alongside her colleagues to organize an anti-Bill 21 rally, an event that she didn't think would be possible or even on the radar for schools without any Muslim representation on their staff.

In addition to speaking up in their workplaces and organizing actively against Islamophobia and racism, several other women we interviewed spoke out in public and in the media as well. Natalie, Meriam, Soundous and Salama shared their experiences of speaking out publicly in the media and in court. Meriam explained her choice to speak out not only as a way of channeling her anger and frustration towards something productive, but also as a way of refuting stereotypes about Muslim women. She explained:

"I was [a] low key girl, it was just kind of like, I want to hide in a corner. I used to feel bad for people who were on the news! But you know...it was hard for sure, it changed me as a person. Because now I'm angry...I want to harvest it. I don't just want to be angry. I want that anger to lead to something. [I decided] I'm going to talk everywhere I can talk...because that's not what they want. They want me not to. They want all of us not to. They'd rather you and I stay home and just feed into their stereotype. Or just leave! They'd rather see that. And we're not gonna give them that satisfaction. We're not."

Soundous described a similar desire to dispel stereotypes of Muslim women as submissive. She described her decision to testify in court in support of the legal challenge to Bill 21 as follows: "I show myself as a Muslim woman when it comes to asserting myself." For her, being assertive and speaking out was part of who she is as a Muslim woman, and she was aware that this would go against the grain of dominant perceptions of Muslim women.

The role of allies in organizing against Bill 21 was central to a number of women who chose to speak out more publicly. Meriam, for example, a teacher who was thrust into the spotlight unexpectedly described the support and encouragement she received from her colleagues, parents and students as foundational to her choice to speak out: "It gave me strength. It was so powerfully moving...uplifting, touching, heartwarming...It gave me the courage to talk about it."

Notably, while many women courageously stood up and spoke out, almost all of them also described the accompanying feelings of exhaustion and that there was so much more to do. Soundous described it as "[Bill 21] asked me to do more. Not just for me as a Muslim teacher, but for our students...for new generations." Natalie, who wears a hijab and also lives with a disability described her experience of speaking out as follows, "it just takes so much out of me you know...I can't shut up, but then after I've spoken...I'm like drained for the rest of the day."

VIII.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this report, we propose 11 recommendations to address the discrimination and hate Muslim women face as they search for employment and as they navigate workplace experiences. The recommendations below were developed through community consultations about the findings of the report. Each recommendation specifies the applicable level of government and/or government agencies. In addition, we provide some recommendations for what allies and supporters can do.

"Second-class citizenship"

One of the overarching themes that emerged in this report was the relegation of Muslim women to "second-class citizens," as one of our interview respondents put it. This terminology captures the discrepancies in the experiences of Muslim women in Québec since the passage of Bill 21, as compared to the general population. Muslim women are facing more hostile work environments, more discriminatory workplace practices, and are disadvantaged and ostracized in multiple ways in a climate of increasing social discord. We recommend, that above all, governments take action to strike down the law.

1. Department of Justice (federal): We urge the federal government to keep its promise of intervening in the legal challenge against Bill 21. We further recommend that the Department of Justice challenge the use of the notwithstanding clause to create second-class citizenship, and to prevent the legalization of violations of the human rights of racial and religious minorities by governments by convening a constitutional conference.

2. Government of Québec: While we are aware that the government of Québec led by Premier Legault has entrenched its position on maintaining second-class citizenship through upholding Bill 21, we draw attention to the fact that the simplest solution to the challenges raised in this report is that the Government of Québec repeal Bill 21 immediately.

Temporary mitigation of career derailments

Bill 21 has led to the derailment of many Muslim women's careers and had an impact on the livelihood of many others in employment sectors within and beyond the scope of the law. The passage of Bill 21 has poisoned the broader employment environment and we recommend that innovative steps be taken to mitigate these impacts and that these initiatives remain in place as long as Bill 21 remains law.

3. Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC): We recommend that ESDC create a pilot employment insurance program for trained professionals who are unable to work in their professions because of Bill 21.

4. Employment and Social Development Canada: Given the experiences of career derailment for Muslim women due to Bill 21, we recommend that ESDC offer re-training subsidies for those who are forced to change their career paths for as long as Bill 21 remains law.

5. Department of Canadian Heritage: Dedicate anti-racism capacity building funds for community-based organizations and hotlines that support Muslim women's employment and provide legal supports for employment discrimination.

Addressing workplace safety, discrimination and harassment

One of the major findings of this report is that Muslim women face disproportionately high levels of hostility in their workplaces including microaggressions, hateful remarks, threats and physical violence since Bill 21 became law. This includes workplaces that are technically beyond the scope of the law, yet are still influenced by Bill 21. We urge all levels of government to take action to ensure that this does not become the new norm.

6. Employment and Social Development Canada (federal) and CNESST (Québec): Invest in trainings of workplace safety, harassment, violence, and human rights in key employment sectors in Québec to mitigate the impacts of return to work in person as COVID-19 measures are lifted in workplaces. These should include reminders of employer responsibilities and suggestions for policy changes within workplaces to strengthen protections and deterrents.

7. Women and Gender Equality Canada: Invest in anti-Islamophobia trainings focusing on gendered Islamophobia in strategic employment sectors in Québec.

8. Women and Gender Equality Canada: Further collection of disaggregated data to study Muslim women's intersectional experiences of workplace discrimination and violence in targeted sectors (healthcare, education, retail, private).

Striving towards better mental health

Since Bill 21 became law, Muslim women in Québec report feeling a loss of a sense of belonging, alongside high levels of alienation and a bleak future outlook. Very few of the women who participated in this study had turned to mental health supports. Alongside trauma and vicarious trauma from witnessing or experiencing Islamophobic hate crimes, Muslim women are also trying to go about their everyday lives in a social and political climate where they feel they are marked as targets. We recommend that targeted efforts be made to make accessible and appropriate mental health resources available for Muslim women in Québec.

9. Department of Health (federal): Allocate funding for culturally responsive mental health care and resources for Muslim women in partnership with Muslim community organizations in Québec (e.g. mosques, student groups, women's organizations, community centres) to create resources for support and spaces of healing.

Public education

The experiences of the survey and interview respondents in this study point to a broader problem of Islamophobic myths and stereotypes about Muslim women that have gone unchecked. In addition to workplace trainings as mentioned above, we recommend that governments engage in broader public education campaigns that dismantle racist stereotypes and counter inaccurate and harmful narratives about Muslim women.

10. Québec Municipalities: Engage in anti-Islamophobia public education campaigns including investing in arts and culture programs with a focus on Muslim women and gendered Islamophobia.

11. Department of Canadian Heritage: Establish a dedicated stream of funding focused on bilingual media productions about Muslim communities and Islamophobia within the Canada Media Fund.

Allyship, solidarity and support

In addition to action recommended for governments, we also emphasize the importance of allyship as highlighted in many of the stories of the interviewees who participated in this study. Muslim women in Québec are standing up for themselves in many different ways, and we encourage anyone who stands for human rights and freedom to stand with Muslim women as allies. This is especially important as more and more workplaces are returning to work in person since the lifting of COVID-19 measures. Allyship can take many different forms:

1. Be an ally in bringing about systemic changes in your workplaces. Help to create or strengthen policies to protect against racism and Islamophobia. Help organize events, workshops, or lunch n' learns for your colleagues to help dismantle stereotypes and create a more inclusive work culture.

2. Engage with your local elected officials (municipal, provincial and federal) to support any of the recommendations mentioned above.

3. Amplify the voices of Muslim women in Québec who are courageously speaking out and standing up for their rights. Share their stories on social media and with your personal and professional networks.

About the Authors

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Dr. Hasan is an Assistant Professor at York University whose research and teaching focus on Islamophobia and gender. Her work examines systemic racism and Islamophobia in legal, administrative, and discursive regimes and their relation to transnational Muslim life. She previously served as the Chief Operating Officer of the National Council of Canadian Muslims where she led major public advocacy campaigns against Islamophobia in Canada. She leads innovative research initiatives on Islamophobia in partnership with academic institutions and community organizations. Dr. Hasan is a published author of several studies related to Muslim women and systemic Islamophobia.

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Endnotes

1. In this study, we will refer to the "Act respecting the laicity of the State" as "Bill 21" in English and "Loi 21" in French. Although Bill 21 became law in 2019 and is no longer a bill, it continues to be referred to as "Bill 21" colloquially by many in English.

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50. Based on 2021 StatCan Census data on gender, income, and workforce participation rates in Québec.

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