



## End Islamophobic Coverage Of Muslim Sexual Violence Survivors

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Police-reported hate crimes against Muslims have more than doubled over the past three years in Canada.

Quite often, visibly Muslim women receive the worst of Islamophobic violence and harassment. And when they face violence from within their communities, Muslim women may be unlikely to report it, knowing that their communities are already over-policed.

To learn more, we spoke to Naheed Mustafa and Chelby Daigle about sexual violence and Muslim communities, and how the media can best share stories of Muslim survivors.

Naheed Mustafa is an award-winning writer and broadcaster. She has done extensive training and skills development for not-for-profits, journalists, and activists.

Chelby Daigle is a community connector, passionate about gender equity, anti-racism, youth empowerment, and civic engagement.

### **Interviewer: What are the challenges you've seen in media reporting on sexual violence enacted against Muslim women?**

**Naheed:** "There isn't a lot of education among reporters, producers and editors about the lives of Muslims, even in Canada. And a lot of what does get covered is covered through the lens of 9/11. We see those sort of regular tropes reenacted again and again around 'honour' and culture. There is a lot of racism implicit in it."

"Part of it is also the way that journalism works. Increasingly, you have reporters that are not attached to a subject area. They don't have beats anymore. It's basically, 'crank things out and crank them out as fast as you can'... And by fracturing the coverage, you end up really simplifying it."

"Frankly, there is an issue that media is predominantly white. The people that are covering these stories are not people from these communities. And they don't understand how things work... People of color are graduating at very high rates from journalism schools. But they're not staying in journalism. Part of that... is a result of the systemic barriers that people of color find."

**Chelby:** "Sexual violence is not handled very well in the media, period. And we've seen that even when the white woman is the victim of sexual violence, it can often be turned against her. ... Often things that are sexual are sensationalized. Or [they] try to blame the victim."

"So I think the more interesting issue is what young Muslim and Muslim women have been producing themselves... I think that's really where blogging, social media [come in]... people that are creating their own spaces is the answer to combatting a lot of this."

**Interviewer: How would you like to see Muslim communities creating consent culture?**

**Chelby:** "Creating consent culture is actually going back to some of those hadith... around issues of sexuality. We are talking more openly that our tradition speaks quite elaborately about sexuality and that... it should be mutual experience for both people. Woman is not an object to be used... We should just go back to our own traditions to... counter these other narratives."

**Naheed:** "We have to encourage [women] to be able to talk about these things without judgement. And to understand that in the case of sexual violence, for example, that it is a crime. You wouldn't turn on someone that was mugged or for getting in a traffic accident... [or] because they were robbed... Why would you turn on someone because they were sexually assaulted?"

"[There's also] the need to educate young boys. And make sure... whether it's in the home, or it's in any space where young boys are connecting, to really model behavior that's respectful."

**Chelby:** "I see young women connecting consent culture with combatting slut-shaming. That's a big issue everywhere, but in the context of Muslim community it is really looking at how we're describing particular issues in hijab. There are times when really the language around hijab becomes really quite slut-shaming -- like, 'If you don't wear this you are a lollipop that's attracting flies.' There's such an inherent narrative of sexual violence underlying that image."

**Interviewer: Statistics show most survivors don't report. Why is it important to have diverse representations of survivorship in media reporting?**

**Naheed:** "There's no one way to get through this.... I think just the diversity of that story would encourage people to understand that this plays out multiple ways but also encourage women from a variety of backgrounds to understand that they're not alone... It happens in all communities and there are multiple ways of dealing with it."

**Chelby:** "Not everyone necessarily wants to report to the police. And that's not always... part of their healing process. They might really just need to focus on healing, and reporting [to the police] is difficult, period... I think it's definitely important to see other narratives of survival."

"Do you always necessarily want certain stories getting out in the media... when you don't know if you can control the story? Which is why, I think, ultimately a lot of people don't want their story getting into the media. Because you never know where it's going to go."

**Naheed:** "A lot of Muslims are reluctant to talk about what's negative in their community because they feel like they're betraying the community. They feel like it's already a community under siege."

**Interviewer:** **There has been a swell in media coverage of rape culture in recent months. What conversations are you glad to see happening, and what do we still need to address?**

**Naheed:** "When it comes to talking about sexual violence [against Muslim women] in public fora it's still mostly talked about in terms of tactical war, whether it's because of ISIS or what's happening in Iraq or how rape is dealt with as an 'honour' issue in Muslim countries.

That's the prevailing narrative. So I think it becomes difficult for Muslim women here because every time someone brings something up, it kind of hearkens to that. It becomes... a 'fundamentalist' or... 'religious' problem."

**Chelby:** "I think what's been interesting for me in terms of this emergence of [discussions on] rape culture is recognizing that this misogyny is a systemic problem."

*This blog is part of a series of interviews femifesto is publishing on media reporting and sexual violence in diverse communities across Canada.*