THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN THE PHENOMENON OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

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ABSTRACT

Islamophobia has been emerging as a significant global issue, profoundly impacting Muslims both individually and collectively in their societies. With rapid technological advancement, the internet and social media have become major platforms for the propagation of Islamophobic sentiments. This study explores the role of various social media platforms in developing and fostering online Islamophobia resulting in offline hate crimes against Muslims, especially in Western countries. Islamophobia's consequences span physical, psychological, and social dimensions, manifesting in heightened stress, mental health issues, and social marginalization. On an individual level, it results in adverse physical health outcomes, such as heightened stress and related health issues. The psychological toll, though challenging to quantify precisely, contributes to a host of mental health problems among affected individuals. Socially, Muslims frequently face marginalization in their own communities, encountering discrimination that intensifies their sense of isolation and otherness. Furthermore, online hate speech and stereotyping of Muslims tend to surge following acts of terror, reflecting pre-existing Islamophobic sentiments. Sadly, terrorism is disproportionately associated with Islam, influencing policies that target Muslim communities negatively. The lack of specific anti-Islamophobic laws further complicates the issue, making it challenging to assess the full extent of the problem. The results of this study show that Muslims in Western countries face discrimination in their day-to-day life which affects their health and

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also their choices regarding their education, career and social activities. Despite these challenges, there are encouraging efforts by individuals, organizations, and governments working toward countering misconceptions about Islam and promoting inclusivity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia, the irrational and unfounded aversion to Islam and Muslims, has grown to become a global concern, transcending geographical boundaries, and affecting diverse communities. This irrational fear is deeply rooted in misconceptions and stereotypes about the Islamic faith and its followers. These misconceptions can manifest in various ways, leading to real-world discrimination and social exclusion for Muslim individuals and communities.

A significant contributor to the persistence of Islamophobia is the influence of social media and online platforms. These platforms often harbour negative narratives that portray Muslims as violent and resistant to Western values. Some of the far-right groups use disinformation and manipulation to demonize Muslims and their faith. The insufficient monitoring of these right-wing groups by social media perpetuates and deepens existing stereotypes, contributing to the cycle of prejudice and discrimination. This failure to address hate content promoting Islamophobia could result in increased support for restrictions on Muslims and military actions against Muslim-majority countries.

One of the most tangible consequences of Islamophobia is the systematic discrimination faced by Muslims in their daily lives. This discrimination can manifest in employment settings, where qualified individuals may face bias and find their career opportunities limited. In educational institutions, Muslim students may experience prejudice, making it harder for them to access quality education. In addition, Muslims may find themselves deliberately excluded from social and political activities, limiting their ability to participate fully in the societies they are a part of.

Beyond these institutional barriers, Islamophobia also has far-reaching consequences on individuals' access to essential services, such as healthcare. The fear and hostility faced by Muslims can result in unequal access to healthcare resources, leading to disparities in health outcomes. Moreover, it leaves the Muslim community more vulnerable to hate crimes and violence, which can have severe physical and psychological effects.

It is essential to recognize that the impact of Islamophobia is not confined to specific regions. It has a global reach, affecting Muslim communities in Western societies, where they often withstand the worst of discrimination and prejudice.

Nevertheless, amidst these challenges, there is an opportunity to harness the power of the internet, particularly social media, as a tool for positive change. By strategically countering these negative narratives online and promoting a more accurate and positive image of Islam, it is possible to foster a better understanding of the religion and its followers. This involves not only challenging stereotypes but also highlighting the diverse

contributions of Muslims to their societies and the world at large.

Addressing Islamophobia is a multifaceted endeavour that requires tireless and sincere efforts to raise awareness, enacting legal protections, and engaging in proactive online initiatives. These efforts aim to counter prejudice, promote inclusivity and understanding, and create a world where all individuals, regardless of their faith, can coexist in harmony and mutual respect.

1.1 Aims and Objectives:

RO1: To study the role of the internet in developing the phenomenon of Islamophobia mainly in Western countries.

RO2: To find out the negative reaction of people and states resulting from Islamophobia affecting Muslims around the world in their daily lives.

RO3: To look for quick and efficient means of the internet which can be used by *Da'ees* and commoners to portray the true and soft image of Islam globally.

1.2 Research Questions

The thesis addresses the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What role did the internet play in spreading Islamophobia especially in Western societies?

RQ2: What are the adverse effects of internet-based Islamophobia on Muslims around the world?

RQ3: How can the internet be used to tackle the current challenges of Islamophobia and develop a soft image of Islam?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Saif Shahin's 2021 research article, titled "How Social Media, Assisted by Bots, Amplifies Islamophobia Online," investigates the role of social media in worsening Islamophobia. Shahin discusses a Facebook ad campaign falsely linking politicians Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib to terrorism and expresses concerns that online attacks on Muslims go beyond political figures, persisting in digital spaces. The proliferation of both genuine and fake social media accounts is contributing to the rise of Islamophobia, leading to hostility towards the broader Muslim community.

Giulia Avolvi (2018) discusses the topic of online and offline Islamophobia in their 2018 article "Hate in a Tweet: Exploring Internet-Based Islamophobic Discourses." They analyse tweets following the Brexit referendum in the UK and argue that online Islamophobia exacerbates offline anti-Islam discussions. These online discussions often depict Muslims as regressive, violent, and incompatible with Western values. Avolvi emphasizes the connection between the creation of anti-Muslim hashtags and specific triggering events, such as blaming Muslims for ISIS-claimed attacks in Paris in 2015 and the New Year's Eve 2015/2016 sexual assaults in Cologne.

Avolvi (2018) urges scholars to address both offline aggression and online Islamophobia, emphasizing the importance of digital media literacy to identify trolling behaviours, fake news, and the harmful impact of hate speech in both online and offline

contexts. They also highlight the positive side of the internet, where it allows spaces for Muslims to express their views and counteract Islamophobic prejudice, as seen in the creation of initiatives like #MuslimWomenDay by Muslim women to share their individual experiences.

The report "Islamophobia in Europe has been worsened in 2020," authored by Handen Kazanci and co-edited by Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez, discusses the escalating problem of Islamophobia in Europe. In 2020, there was a significant surge in anti-Muslim hate crimes, with some European countries experiencing a doubling or even tripling of such incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Contrary to expectations, the report indicates that Islamophobia has not improved but has, in fact, worsened.

The report points to instances of state violence against Muslims, particularly in France and Austria, often justified under the umbrella of counter-terrorism legislation. Notably, the anti-separatism law in France has come under scrutiny. While the government argues that it is intended to fortify the country's secular system, critics (imams, teachers of Islamic sciences and presidents of associations in France) argue that it restricts religious freedom and further marginalizes Muslim communities.

To compile this report, 37 local scholars, experts, and civil society activists with a background in racism and human rights collaborated to investigate the root causes contributing to the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Europe.

The findings underscore the pressing need for more substantial and concerted efforts from both civil and religious Muslim communities to combat the growing issue of Islamophobia in Europe. This report stating the worsening condition of Islamophobia in Europe even in the year 2020, highlights the urgency of addressing this problem and fostering religious tolerance and social cohesion in the region, with an active role played by scholars and civil society in raising awareness and seeking solutions.

Areeza Ali Smith's (2017) research delves into the psychological consequences of Islamophobia on Muslim Americans over the past fifteen years, leading to disruptions in their personal identities and ways of life. Smith's study, titled "The Impact of Islamophobia on the Muslim American Community": accounts of Psychological Suffering, Identity Negotiation, and Collective Trauma," reveals that Muslim Americans have experienced severe emotional symptoms like fear, stress, worry, isolation, numbness, desensitization, and insecurity due to Islamophobia. Similar findings were also observed by Hadeel Ali in 2016, with a pilot study involving Muslim Americans reporting experiences of Islamophobia affecting their academic, social, occupational, and religious aspects of life.

In the academic sphere, Muslim students facing Islamophobia sometimes feel compelled to change their educational institutions or living situations, leading to social isolation. The presence of online Islamophobia, including discriminatory comments, news, and articles, has discouraged the use of certain social media platforms among Muslim Americans.

Furthermore, Islamophobia has also impacted the religious practices of some Muslim Americans, prompting them to consider abandoning visible signs of their Muslim identity, such as the hijab, avoiding mosque visits, or even questioning their faith. Responding to a research question about the psychological effects of Islamophobia, Hadeel Ali (2021) noted that it contributes to mental health issues, leading to increased anxiety and reduced self-esteem, which can be associated with symptoms of depression, further intensifying feelings of not belonging. The study underscores that structural Islamophobia, particularly around the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, is at the root of these adverse psychological effects on Muslim Americans, illustrating how systemic discrimination can deeply affect their lives and well-being.

Open Society Foundation (2019) urges that Islamophobia in Europe and the West stems from concerns about Muslim immigrant integration, worsened by factors like the 2007 economic crisis, the rise of populist leaders, and terrorist attacks by extremists. Biased media reporting has added to negative stereotypes and government policies like bans on religious attire and mosque restrictions, have marginalized Muslim communities. Post-9/11, public opinion shifted negatively towards Muslims and increased incidents of Islamophobia. The U.S. also implemented travel bans on Muslim-majority countries, institutionalizing xenophobia, and Islamophobia.

3. METHODOLOGY

In my research on Islamophobia, I undertook a comprehensive qualitative study because I could easily access data online

which I needed for my thesis. I utilized various sources and research methods. I gathered data from an array of sources, encompassing research papers e.g. (Bouchaib Benzehaf (2017), Covering Islam in Western Media: From Islamic to Islamophobic Discourses and Areeza Ali (2017), The impact of Islamophobia on the Muslim American community) recent surveys, reports, and online resources. My research approach also benefited from the resources provided by the IOU library, which granted access to full texts of sources that were not publicly available. I took a historical perspective by analysing a diverse range of literature spanning at least two decades, enabling me to track the evolution of Islamophobia over time. Additionally, I delved into the psychological aspects of the issue by examining surveys conducted in Western countries, particularly in educational institutions. To clearly present my findings, I structured my research with a dedicated discussion section and included recommendations that could guide policy changes, educational initiatives, and advocacy efforts to address Islamophobia effectively. Moreover, I noted positive developments in the fight against Islamophobia, such as the work of organizations in Western countries, OIC conferences, and reports from Muslim nations. I also acknowledged the role of Da'ees (Islamic propagators) in Western countries, emphasizing their use of online platforms to combat Islamophobia, underscoring the increasing importance of digital media today. In sum, my research incorporated a multifaceted approach to understanding and addressing Islamophobia, and it is likely to provide valuable insights into this complex issue.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section starts with the introduction of Islamophobia leading to explain the role of social media, its different platforms and their role in propagating Islamophobia. This section also looks into the different Muslim violent groups spoiling the image of Islam under the heading of 'Violent Extremism". Second part discusses the online and offline Islamophobia and its consequences on Muslims in Western societies including the OIC 2022 report on Islamophobia, the role of law enforcement agencies and media in this regard. The third and last section presents the positive role of social media, some inspiring events and conclusion.

Islamophobia can be defined as a spectrum of negative attitudes and feelings towards Muslims and their religion, encompassing various aspects such as bias, intolerance, preconceived notions, fear, and even hatred. Halstead (2008) describes it as ranging from general prejudice to extreme dread and animosity. Imran and Irene (2020) presented an alternative definition to the United Nations, emphasizing that it involves fear, prejudice, and hatred directed at both Muslims and non-Muslims, resulting in hostility, intolerance, and various forms of harassment, intimidation, and provocation in both online and offline contexts. This hostility is fuelled by institutional, ideological, political, and religious factors and takes the form of structural and cultural racism that targets the symbols and identifiers of Muslim identity.

The term "Islamophobia" has a long history, originating in 1918 when two French researchers who had converted to Islam observed colonial powers' efforts to undermine the religion.

However, it gained wider recognition in the 1990s with the publication of the Runnymede Trust's report, "Islamophobia: A challenge for us all." Since the early 21st century, especially following the events of 9/11, there has been a significant increase in discrimination, racism, hatred, and animosity directed towards Muslims, resulting in the widespread use of the term. Runnymede Trust (1997) finds it a helpful term to describe the fear and strong aversion to Islam or the marginalization of Muslims, while also acknowledging that it can lead to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social activities, perpetuating segregation, injustice, and cruelty towards Muslim individuals and communities.

Despite Islam being the second-largest religion globally, Muslims have experienced various forms of Islamophobia. Western media has played a significant role in propagating negative stereotypes and hindering a fair depiction of Islam. Muslims are often stigmatized as radical or uneducated, with the events of 9/11 reinforcing these stereotypes. Consequently, Islam is often perceived as a threat to Western societies and their values, shaping global interactions with and perceptions of Islam and its adherents.

4.1 Online Islamophobia

The widespread use of new media technologies and the internet has significantly improved global communication. However, it also has a dark side, as online harassment, hate speech, and cyberbullying have become common issues. Hate speech, which involves expressions that incite harm, fear, and threats against specific groups, is prevalent on the internet.

The internet is recognized as a major platform for the spread of hate speech, with a focus on targeting groups like Muslims. Statistics show that offensive language and threats are widespread online. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are common places for the propagation of hate speech, partly due to the lack of effective restrictions. The internet is increasingly recognized as a breeding ground for hate speech, as Hall noted in 2013. A considerable proportion of this hate speech is aimed at Muslims, with Littler and Feldman's 2015 findings revealing that 73% of incidents targeting Muslims occurred in the online realm. In the United States in 2014, a survey indicated that 60% of internet users had encountered offensive name-calling, and 25% had witnessed physical threats online, underlining the prevalence of online harassment. Moreover, Faisal and Mukhtar's 2019 research emphasized the internet's dominant role as a news source, with 47% of respondents relying on it for news consumption. Many respondents also disclosed firsthand experiences with online hate speech in various forms, underscoring its tangible impact on individuals. The study further highlighted the popular online platforms used to disseminate hate speech, including Facebook (85%), Twitter (64%), YouTube (53%), blogs (41%), emails (23%), and online news platforms (10%). Addressing this issue, especially when targeting specific groups like Muslims, is a multifaceted challenge, requiring a delicate balance between safeguarding freedom of expression and addressing online hate speech and harassment.

Notably, online harassment based on gender and religion is on the rise. To ensure the safety of internet users, there is a need

for measures to address and prevent the spread of hate speech on online platforms.

4.1.1 Twitter

Islamophobic discourse is a significant problem on Twitter, where hate speech and anti-Muslim sentiments are prevalent. Such content is often driven by individuals with clear biases against Islam and is exacerbated following incidents like terror attacks, where Muslims are unfairly blamed. Disturbing hashtags like "#KillAllMuslims" and campaigns like #BanIslam contributes to online hatred and fear. The rapid creation and sharing of such content make it challenging to control or censor. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach, including education, community support, and strengthened reporting and moderation mechanisms on social media platforms. Legal frameworks and international cooperation are also important in curbing online hate speech.

4.1.2 Facebook

Facebook, a rapidly expanding social media platform with a substantial user base, has grappled with a pervasive issue of hate speech. In 2016, research discovered nearly 500 instances of hate speech directed at Muslim communities on the platform. Particularly alarming is Facebook's negative influence on Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, as it has strayed from its original intentions, according to a UN Special Rapporteur. A troubling trend involves "cloaked Facebook pages" that spread political propaganda while posing as adversaries. Some fake Islamist pages, operating under Muslim identities, promote extremist views and incite negative

reactions from non-Muslims. Despite Facebook's efforts to ban hate speech, it remains easily accessible, with ongoing challenges in removing pages that support anti-Muslim ideologies. Concerns extend to perceived systemic bias within social media companies, as reported hate actors often face little consequence. Calls for addressing harmful stereotypes and proactive measures against hate speech targeting Muslims have arisen, with action typically triggered by external pressure and public exposure.

4.2 Stereotypes about Muslims

Stigma, as defined by Croker et al. (1998), refers to the negative perception of a particular social identity or attribute in society. Muslims living in Western countries often deal with negative stereotypes, such as being labelled as "terrorists," "violent," "anti-American," or "oppressive towards women." Hadeel Ali's 2016 study on Muslim Americans discovered that a significant majority (78.57%) of participants had encountered societal messages portraying Muslims as hateful, aggressive, and unpatriotic, often associating them with terms like "terrorists" and "refugees." Additionally, more than 64% of participants reported being seen as "others," with mistaken assumptions about them being Arab, immigrants, or refugees. Furthermore, half of the participants (50%) acknowledged the stereotype that Muslim women are oppressed.

Being exposed to such stigmatizing labels can make Muslims in the West vulnerable to verbal harassment and criticism in their everyday lives. Hadeel's 2016 study found that verbal harassment, including criticism of wearing the hijab, accusations of involvement in terrorism, and negative

judgments about Islam, was a common and nearly universal experience for Muslim Americans. About 21.43% of participants reported encountering verbal harassment, especially on social media platforms.

4.3 Violent Extremism

The term "violent extremism" lacks a universally agreed-upon definition and is often used interchangeably with "terrorism." It encompasses actions involving violence or the incitement to violence, expanding beyond terrorism to include various forms of ideologically motivated violence. Efforts to prevent violent extremism (PVE) face challenges like oversimplification and associations with specific nationalities and religions. The concept of "radicalization" is central in counter-terrorism prevention, focusing on individuals adopting extremist beliefs and a willingness to use violence. However, the overemphasis on religious ideology as the sole driver of terrorism neglects other significant factors, such as political disillusionment. In an interview, French President Macron highlighted the need to combat violent extremist groups while distinguishing them from the broader Muslim community. Recognizing that most extremist incidents occur within predominantly Muslim countries and target other Muslims is crucial, as it dispels the notion of a clash of civilizations. Addressing extremism requires nuanced approaches and long-term security partnerships. Anthony (2017) conducted an analysis aiming to elucidate global terrorism patterns and their association with Islam, drawing from diverse information sources. However, he acknowledged certain limitations in his analysis, mainly stemming from inconsistent and unreliable data in critical areas

and the intricate nature of summarizing multifaceted factors and trends. His analysis heavily relied on the START database, a resource utilized by the U.S. State Department for its annual reports on terrorism in various countries. Additionally, his study integrated survey data capturing Muslim public opinion, information concerning broader divisions contributing to violence and extremism within the Muslim world, and official sources highlighting collaborative endeavours aimed at combating terrorism, involving partnerships between Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority nations.

4.4 Extremism in Largely Muslim Countries

Global terrorism patterns have shown a significant presence of extremism primarily in predominantly Muslim countries, with 85% of recorded terrorist attacks from 2011 to 2016 occurring in these regions, notably in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where 73% of such incidents took place. However, it is crucial to avoid generalizations and recognize that not all acts of extremism or terrorism in these areas reflect the beliefs or values of the entire Muslim population. The report also highlights that only a small fraction of these incidents can be attributed to groups like ISIS, even with the highest estimates. Moreover, when including Afghanistan alongside Iraq and Syria, which have partnerships with Muslim governments, these three countries collectively represent 37% of the global total. It is essential to acknowledge the complex factors contributing to extremism and terrorism, encompassing political, social, economic, and ideological elements, among others. Drawing sweeping conclusions about an entire region or religion based on the actions of a subset of extremist groups

can lead to misconceptions and the perpetuation of stereotypes.

The report's fourth section underscores that extremist attacks in the United States and Europe have real casualties, but it's important to acknowledge that Muslims are often the primary victims. The data reveals a significant difference in the number of deaths, with predominantly Islamic regions experiencing 28,031 deaths compared to 658 deaths in Europe and America from 2015 to 2016. Most terrorist attacks in 2016 occurred in countries with Muslim majorities, mainly conducted by "Islamic" extremist groups. This highlights the disproportionate impact of extremist violence on Muslims, especially in regions where they are the majority.

The fifth section emphasizes that governments in Muslim-majority states are actively combating religious extremism. However, these efforts sometimes pose challenges to freedom of religion and speech, requiring a careful balance.

The subsequent section underscores the loyalty and support of American Muslims towards the United States, with most terrorist attacks not being committed by Muslims. However, it also points to the increasing problem of Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims in the U.S., which often result in more severe forms of violence.

The report then stresses the vital role of Islamic states as strategic partners in countering extremism. These nations actively cooperate in addressing the threat of "Islamist" extremism, necessitating strong, enduring partnerships, particularly given the projected increase in the global Muslim

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population. The report advises against dividing the world along religious lines and highlights the importance of positive relationships with Muslim nations to address extremism and promote global stability.

In the last section, the report acknowledges that while groups like ISIS, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban pose significant threats, they represent only a portion of the broader and long-lasting problem of extremism. It underscores the need to address not just these specific organizations but also the underlying causes contributing to terrorism and extremism, emphasizing the necessity of a comprehensive approach to effectively address these complex challenges.

4.5 Online/Offline Islamophobia

Online dehumanization, disgust, and the encouragement of harm have real-world consequences, with social media platforms playing a role in promoting actual violence. A report points out organized groups promoting anti-Muslim hatred, mainly based in the United States, followed by Australia, Canada, India, the United Kingdom, Israel, and some European countries. This globalization of the far-right movement, viewing Western identity as threatened by Islam, has created a transnational problem for Muslims, necessitating an international response.

In France, following a series of terrorist attacks in 2015, there has been a notable increase in Islamophobia and hate crimes against the Muslim community. For instance, immediately after the Charlie Hebdo attack, 54 anti-Muslim incidents were recorded in the subsequent week. A 2019 study revealed that

42% of French Muslims faced discrimination based on their faith, with 60% of women wearing a headscarf experiencing such discrimination. In 2021, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) analysed anti-Muslim discussions on Twitter and Facebook in France, using a list of hateful keywords linked to anti-Muslim discourse. This analysis covered the period from September 1, 2020, to February 1, 2021 (Facebook) or March 1, 2021 (Twitter).

A significant increase in Twitter activity occurred on October 21st, with an 823% surge in posts between October 20th and 30th. The second peak was on February 4, 2021, during discussions about a headscarf-related bill, and the third on January 31, 2021, tied to an event organized by Nemesis, a group openly promoting anti-immigration and Islamophobic views. These trends on Twitter also extended to Facebook.

The trending posts often depicted visible aspects of Muslim faith identity, like the headscarf, mosques, and halal food, as potential threats to the country, with some posts even linking Muslims to acts of terrorism.

Another study by King and Sutton (2013) in Germany examined hate speech and cyber hate directed at Muslims and the events triggering this animosity. The study found that recent events could exacerbate cyber hate dynamics, leading to retaliatory expressions of hatred between different groups. This research also suggested that online communities contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes against various groups.

4.6 Offline Consequences

The material offered provides light on the global issue of Islamophobia and the resulting hate crimes against Muslim populations. Notable aspects include the rise of Islamophobia in France since the 2015 terrorist attacks, which has resulted in discrimination, particularly towards Muslim women who wear the hijab. In Australia, Muslims have received death threats, prompting concerns about public views and their influence on safety. After the 2016 Presidential Election, there has been an increase in anti-Muslim incidents in the United States, with Muslim women wearing headscarves facing increased vulnerability. Several violent attacks against Muslims have occurred in the United Kingdom, raising worries about airport security measures. Even though there is no severe gender discrimination in Canada, Muslim teenagers report experiencing Islamophobia. Muslim women and girls in Australia, particularly those wearing hijabs, face verbal harassment, intimidation, and death threats. The OSCE ODHIR study emphasises the pervasiveness of hate crimes against Muslims around the world. To prevent discrimination and hate crimes, a comprehensive plan encompassing awareness, education, legal safeguards, and community support is required.

4.7 Anti Mosque Activity

Europe faces significant resistance to mosque construction and expansion, with hostility evident in the Ground Zero mosque controversy in the US. Anti-mosque activities, such as arson, graffiti, and break-ins, have increased, with "us vs. them"

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attitudes. In the US, Islamophobic individuals often target city meetings on zoning and permit issues.

4.8 OIC report on Islamophobia 2022

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Islamophobia Observatory's 14th Annual Report provides insight into the world's Islamophobia while emphasising the negative effects it has on Muslims. The goal of the observatory is to track incidents of violence and prejudice against Muslims and to increase public awareness of the problem. Islamophobia, according to the research, is the term used to describe a variety of unfavourable attitudes, prejudices, and even acts of violence directed at people who are seen as Muslims. It also covers actions taken to harm Islam's reputation. Fundamental rights, societal harmony, and world peace are all at risk from this problem, which is linked to racist movements. It must be addressed via collective worldwide action, including societal, cultural, and educational changes. The OIC actively promotes tolerance and peace while combating terrorism and Islamophobia. To end intolerance and discrimination, OIC Member States' assistance is essential.

Furthermore, understanding the power of the media, OIC has developed a strategy to combat Islamophobia and advance accurate and balanced representations of Islam and Muslims across a range of media channels. This project is ongoing and needs consistent work.

4.9 Social Consequences

The experiences of Muslims in the workplace, in higher education, and in their daily lives are all impacted by

Islamophobia. Hijab-wearing Muslim women frequently face prejudice in a range of contexts, including job applications and consumer interactions, which raises issues and concerns regarding their Muslim identity. According to research, more than half of participants felt that Islamophobia had an impact on their job application processes, especially for Muslim women who wear the hijab or abaya.

Muslim students in higher education encounter problems including teachers who disregard Islamic holidays and show displeasure with Islamic practices, which makes them feel obligated to correct misconceptions about their faith in the classroom. This could prompt students to adjust, such as switching schools or asking for a different room in a dorm. Muslims may experience Islamophobic remarks and rude behaviour even in their daily lives. This demonstrates the extent of Islamophobia and how negatively it affects different facets of Muslims' lives.

4.10   Political Consequences

Terrorist acts frequently cause broad public dread, which can breed structural Islamophobia and inspire lawmakers to pass unneeded and restrictive regulations. This has political repercussions, such as the erroneous notion that Islam is fundamentally violent and that Muslims cannot coexist in Western civilization, which can result in prejudice and mistrust towards Muslims becoming established in national institutions. Islam and Muslims are frequently portrayed as being "other" by the media, which plays a major part in maintaining these prejudices. Muslim communities are frequently singled out by legislation in Western nations, such as the US Patriot Act and

the "Muslim ban," which views them as potential threats that need to be constantly monitored and restricted.

According to studies, those deemed to be Muslims who commit violent crimes are subject to higher legal penalties than their non-Muslim counterparts. Muslims are disproportionately targeted in undercover law enforcement investigations and are frequently subject to arbitrary surveillance. Crimes perpetrated by people deemed to be Muslims may receive more attention in the media than identical offenses committed by non-Muslims.

The prevalence of anti-Muslim language can be influenced by elected officials who have Islamophobic ideas, and in some situations, this can increase the number of violent acts. This discourse frequently divides and politicises matters involving migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, leading to discriminatory legislation. For instance, France has passed several regulations restricting religious practices, which particularly affect Muslim women. These actions have come under fire for violating Muslim women's rights and further marginalising Muslim communities. Attempts to combat terrorism may unintentionally violate civil liberties, thereby maintaining the stereotype that Muslims are not welcome in Western nations.

4.11 Psychological Consequences

There has been a sharp rise in anti-Muslim violence and intimidation in the US after the incident of 9/11, which influenced both Muslim immigrant and native-born communities, especially schools. This pervasive Islamophobia

has negative health effects on stress management, self-identity, interpersonal connections, and general well-being. It serves as a significant stressor, causing alterations in mood and behaviour as well as detrimental health impacts like the emergence of defense systems. Some people have come to believe that hate crimes against Muslims are acceptable because of the link between Islam and terrorism, which has led to conditions like acute stress reactions, bereavement, insomnia, adjustment disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Particularly in kids and teenagers, intolerance towards other religious cultures can have a lasting impact on their mental health, leading to issues with emotion control, anxiety, mood disorders, and despair. Research shows that prejudice and life pressures, particularly for individuals connected to organisations and young people in educational settings, have a substantial impact on the mental health of Western Muslims.

Three key kinds of symptoms – anxiety, depression, and trauma – are revealed by studies on the mental health of American Muslims who are victims of Islamophobia. Nervousness, difficulty controlling anxieties, restlessness, exhaustion, concentration problems, irritability, tension in the muscles, and poor sleep are all common anxiety-related symptoms. These symptoms are significantly triggered by exposure to Islamophobic episodes, especially in public settings, emphasising the added emotional burden that institutional Islamophobia places on Muslims.

4.12 Physiological Consequences

Since psychological stress can cause several physical illnesses, there is a strong link between mental and physical health. Islamophobia, which is characterised by prejudice and stigma, has a significant negative impact on Muslims' well-being by upsetting numerous systems on various levels. Together, these factors shape health determinants by influencing stress responses, exposing people to stereotype threats, affecting social interactions, and being supported by institutional policies and media coverage.

Islamophobia adversely affects the health of Muslim Americans on an individual level by causing stress, which can worsen the start, course, and severity of many diseases. With chronic stress activation having harmful health repercussions, this social marginalisation raises stress levels and causes physiological reactions including elevated cortisol levels and heart rate. Bullying and prejudice are widespread among Muslim kids in the United States, and these incidents can have long-lasting negative effects on their health. Islamophobia and other stress-related symptoms, such as paranoia and psychological discomfort, are linked to discrimination experienced by Muslim Americans.

Threats based on anti-Islamic stereotypes can harm patient-provider relationships on a human level by obstructing communication, weakening confidence in medical advice, and reducing access to healthcare. Some Muslim immigrant women have reported feeling uneasy around healthcare professionals. As a result, Muslim Americans may have less access to

preventive healthcare services and may feel misunderstood by medical professionals.

On a larger scale, structural stigma caused by Islamophobia might result in health inequalities. Health inequities can be caused by or exacerbated by discriminatory attitudes that are ingrained in institutional structures, policies, and media coverage. Acts like the 2001 Patriot Act have increased governmental power, resulting in social division and unequal access to resources, as well as monitoring targeting Muslim Americans. The naturalisation process is rife with racial and religious profiling, which is another way that immigration policies contribute to structural inequality.

Additionally, Muslim Americans' social milieu is significantly shaped by the media, which has a detrimental impact on their health. The media frequently portrays Muslims as "the enemy" and promotes Islamophobia, which results in unequal access to important health determinants like education and employment, restricted access to healthcare, and illness-causing feelings of prejudice.

4.13   Tactics to Tackle Islamophobia

Hadeel (2021) conducted a study on Muslim Americans to determine how they responded to the experience of Islamophobia. His findings on Muslim Americans revealed four categories of reactions: avoidance, letting it go, defending beliefs, and resiliency. Further, in his study on Muslim Americans, Hadeel (2016) found that participants used positive psychology methods. The individuals mentioned employing a variety of approaches, including positive self-talk, and

practicing positive affirmations. journaling and self-compassion activities.

4.14   Law Enforcement Agencies

The 2020 AMAN study emphasises how poorly Western countries' law enforcement agencies manage hate crimes. These underreported incidents are frequently influenced by things like shame, ignorance, and a decline in trust in the legal system. The countless hate crimes committed against mosques and other Islamic institutions further emphasise the far-right movement's presence on a worldwide scale and the need for a coordinated international reaction to stop the harm done to Muslims.

4.15   Positive Role of the Internet

In this section, we discuss the positive role of the internet on the phenomenon of Islamophobia.

4.15.1 Social Media

With its instant impact and global reach, the internet plays a dual role in influencing how people view Islam and Muslims. On the one hand, it might fuel Islamophobia, but on the other, it offers a potent weapon for fighting it. Many Muslims are using the internet to spread information and dispel myths about Islam, especially the younger generation who are adept at social media. Many internet campaigns and projects have been launched, like the "American Muslims: Facts vs. Fiction" film from the Unity Productions Foundation, which dispels popular misconceptions about Muslims.

Through its #MuslimsAreSpeakingOut campaign, the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding highlights the vehement opposition of Muslim authorities to terrorism. Humour effectively challenges preconceptions and misconceptions, as evidenced in initiatives like #Islamophobin and #MuslimReportStuff. These initiatives highlight the necessity of eradicating deeply ingrained prejudices, particularly those pertaining to Muslim women, and show how the internet has the power to communicate culturally sensitive and correct information to a variety of audiences.

4.15.2 Da'wah Through the Internet

The internet has become a potent tool for people to share their religious teachings and ideas with others all over the world, revolutionising how religion is shared in society. This global strategy, which is frequently used in Da'wah (inviting people to accept Islam), has garnered enormous appeal. Islamic academics now use social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to communicate with a worldwide audience and clarify misconceptions about Islam. This is especially important considering incidents like 9/11, which have led to prejudice and ignorance against Muslims. The internet and information technology present a priceless chance to spread awareness of Islam's genuine nature and promote better understanding.

Some positive steps taken to tackle Islamophobia include the following:

- International Day for Combating Islamophobia.
- OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) Observatory for Islamophobia.

- Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022.

5. CONCLUSION

The growth of Islamophobia in Western nations has been considerably aided by the internet, which has served as a forum for hate speech and inaccurate information about Islam and Muslims, especially on social media. As a result of this internet hate speech, there has been violence against Muslims. The far-right movement has exploited the internet to forge a transnational collective identity under the guise of a perceived threat from Islam and Muslims, making Islamophobia a widespread problem. Muslims in Western countries experience prejudice and marginalisation, which influences their daily life and psychological health. Islamophobia is being addressed by certain progressive Muslim groups and young people on social media, highlighting the necessity for all-encompassing approaches. To properly tackle this issue, society must prioritise media literacy, education, and preventing hate speech while adopting a multinational strategy to protect the rights and dignity of Muslims in Western countries.

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