



2023  
**BULLYING  
REPORT**

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# About CAIR-CA



The Council on American-Islamic Relations is the largest American Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. CAIR's mission is to enhance understanding of Islam, protect civil liberties, promote justice, and empower American Muslims. CAIR California is the organization's largest and oldest chapter, with offices in the Greater Los Angeles Area, the Sacramento Valley / Central California, San Diego, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

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# Acknowledgements

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## **Dr. Hatem Bazian**

Executive Director of Islamophobia Studies Center, Editor-in-Chief of Islamophobia Studies Journal, President of International Islamophobia Studies and Research Association, Lecturer in Middle Eastern Languages & Cultures & Asian American Studies at UC Berkeley, and Professor of Islamic Law and Theology, Zaytuna College.



## **Dr. Rania Awaad**

Dr. Rania Awaad M.D., is a Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Stanford University School of Medicine where she is the Director of the Stanford Muslim Mental Health & Islamic Psychology Lab as well as Stanford University's Affiliate Chaplain and Affiliate Professor of Islamic Studies. In the community, she serves as the President of Maristan.org, a holistic mental health nonprofit serving Muslim communities, and the Director of The Rahmah Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating Muslim women and girls. In addition, she is faculty of Islamic Psychology at Cambridge Muslim College and The Islamic Seminary of America. She is also a Senior Fellow for Yaqeen Institute and the Institute of Social Policy and Understanding. Prior to studying medicine, she pursued classical Islamic studies in Damascus, Syria, and holds certifications (ijaza) in the Qur'an, Islamic Law, and other branches of the Islamic Sciences. Follow her @Dr.RaniaAwaad.



## **Kubra Tor-Cabuk**

Kubra Tor-Cabuk is a Ph.D. student in Applied Psychology and Prevention Science at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. She received her MA in Clinical Psychology. Her doctoral research and teaching interests focus on Women's Health, discrimination in medical settings, and healthcare utilization. She is passionate about learning new statistical skills and research methods. She has experience in both quantitative and qualitative research.



#### **Neshwa Rajeh**

Neshwa Rajeh received her MA in public health and is currently a student at Northwestern University studying clinical psychology. Her research interests are mental health, growth mindset, medical education, and injury prevention within minority populations. She comes from a Yemeni background, was born and raised in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan and currently lives in Chicago.



#### **Dr. Altaf Hussain**

Dr. Altaf Hussain is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Community, Administration, and Policy Practice Concentration at the Howard University School of Social Work. His research interests include but are not limited to displaced populations, mental health, and psychosocial well-being of adolescent immigrants and refugees of color in the US. Dr. Hussain serves as the founding Vice President of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research (YIIR), an advisory board member of the Peaceful Families Project (PFP), and a former two-term national president of the Muslim Students Association of the US and Canada and a former Vice President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).



#### **Dr. Sara Deen**

Dr. Sara Deen earned her undergraduate degree, with honors, in Molecular and Cell Biology from UC Berkeley. Subsequently, she pursued her dental degree at UC San Francisco, where she was a fellow in the School of Dentistry's Summer Research Fellowship Program. After completing dental school, she practiced dentistry and was a lecturer at UCLA's Advanced Education in General Dentistry program. While treating patients and mentoring dental residents in diverse Los Angeles County, Sara became interested in building bridges between communities, eventually serving as the President of the South Coast Interfaith Council in 2020-2021 and as a Youth Facilitator at New Ground Muslim Jewish Partnership for Change. Understanding the challenges faced by youth and grateful for her own public education, Dr. Sara Deen was elected as a governing board member of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District in 2022. She continues to serve with great interest in meeting the diverse learning needs of students and mitigating youth mental health challenges.



#### **Alkamalee (Al) Jabbar**

Alkamalee (Al) Jabbar served as a school board member of the Anaheim Union High School Board of Trustees for ten years. With his election in 2014, Mr. Jabbar became the first Sri Lankan American to hold public office in the United States. Al Jabbar ensured to provide many opportunities for Anaheim students. He helped start the Parent Leadership Academy to provide parents with leadership skills to advocate for their kids, created the "Anaheim Educational Pledge" for students to gain priority admission to colleges and free tuition, and prioritized school safety and security. Al Jabbar earned his bachelor's degree in marketing and his master's degree in public administration.

# Executive Summary



**Over the past several years, California has taken steps towards creating more inclusive and welcoming school environments, such as strengthening anti-bullying laws and implementing required ethnic studies courses for all high school students.**

Despite these efforts, Muslim students in California continue to face high levels of Islamophobia (the fear, hatred, or prejudice towards Islam and Muslims) in their schools from peers and adults.

The Council on American Islamic Relations, California (CAIR-CA) has been conducting biennial surveys for the past ten years to evaluate the school climate for California Muslim students between ages 11-18 and to understand how Islamophobia manifests itself in our education system. CAIR-CA's surveys have shown that 40-50% of Muslim students have consistently reported being bullied over the past decade. In CAIR-CA's most recent survey, nearly half of the Muslim students reported being bullied at school, and nearly half reported feeling unsafe, unwelcome, or uncomfortable at school because of their Muslim identity. Furthermore, 25% of students reported that an adult at their school made offensive comments

or acted in a way that was offensive to Islam/ Muslims. Additionally, 34% of respondents reported that these experiences have a negative impact on their physical, mental, or emotional well-being. Unfortunately, these Muslim students must navigate a variety of other intersectional identities, such as their race, ethnicity, national origin, and gender, that impact the ways these students experience bullying in California schools. CAIR-CA's survey found that East Asian, Black/African, and North African/Middle Eastern students reported being bullied at a higher rate than other students. Female students also reported a greater incidence of bullying than their male counterparts and reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at school at nearly double the rate of male students. Given the myriad challenges Muslim students face, CAIR-CA reached out to several experts to address these concerning trends in a series of articles included in this year's report.



First, as illustrated by Dr. Hatem Bazian, it is important to contextualize the historical racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia, as well as the recent rise in hate across America that has been embedded into our education systems, which is reflected in the high rates of bullying that students from marginalized communities report and experience. It is imperative that all sectors of our education system, such as lawmakers, elected officials, school boards, administrators, teachers, parents, and students, take racism and Islamophobia seriously and that these issues do not get dismissed.

Second, as illustrated by Dr. Rania Awaad, Kubra Tor-Cabuk, and Neshwa Rajeh, female Muslim students continue to face their own unique challenges and must navigate complex identities encompassing gender, religious affiliation, race-ethnic identity, and immigration status. As a result, female Muslim students are often vulnerable to encountering various psychological and social obstacles in society and within the education system. To support these students, community-based organizations and religious centers must take proactive steps to create welcoming and supportive environments for these students and offer specialized programming to help address the unique needs of female Muslim students.

Third, the experiences of Islamophobia from peers and adults have an extremely detrimental effect on the mental health of Muslim students. Dr. Altaf Husain addresses how Islamophobia led to the presence of bullying within the school setting, its short and long-term impact on Muslim students' mental health, and how these problems may be carried into adulthood. These negative impacts include internalizing negative stereotypes about Islam, anxiety disorders, depression, psychotic experiences, suicidal ideations, and suicide attempts. Given the severity of the short-term and long-term effects of Islamophobia on Muslim students, further studies, policies, and changes are needed at every level of our school systems to ensure that Islamophobia is addressed and that resources are available to victims of hate-based bullying and harassment in schools.

Last, as Muslim students continue to be impacted by increasing levels of Islamophobia, racism, xenophobia, and gender-based hate, the looming election cycle is bound to exacerbate these issues for Muslim students. Inevitably, the Muslim community, the immigrant community, and other marginalized communities will be the targets for hate-filled political talking points that will impact the school environment as it has in the past.

Given all the challenges Muslim students continue to face, Dr. Sara Deen and Alkamalee (Al) Jabbar provide insight in the recommendation section on how school districts, educators, and parents can combat Islamophobia and bullying to ensure that Muslim students have a positive educational experience. To promote change, it is crucial for policymakers, school districts, educators, parents, and community organizations to actively participate in the effort to address and prevent bullying among Muslim students. Schools should be a safe environment for all students, regardless of their faith, gender, race-ethnicity, or immigration status.



# Key Findings

Nearly half of the students (46%) reported being bullied at school by another student because they were Muslim.



27% of students reported that another student made offensive comments or posts about Islam/Muslims on social media.

## NEARLY 1/2

of students (47%) reported feeling unsafe, unwelcome, or uncomfortable at school because of their Muslim identity.



41% of students reported seeing another Muslim student at school being bullied by another student.

34% of students reported being bullied because they are Muslim has negatively impacted their physical, mental, or emotional well-being.

That's **1** out of **3** students.



32% of students who wear a hijab reported their hijab was tugged, pulled, or offensively touched by another student.

25% of students reported that a teacher, administrator, or other adult at their school made offensive comments or acted in a way that is offensive to Islam or Muslims.



**THAT'S 1  
OUT OF 4  
STUDENTS.**

Of the students that reported being bullied by an adult at school...



40% reported that an adult presented or taught material that was offensive to Islam/Muslims.



20% reported that an adult made offensive comments towards them.

Only 45% of students received support from school staff when they had a problem related to being Muslim.

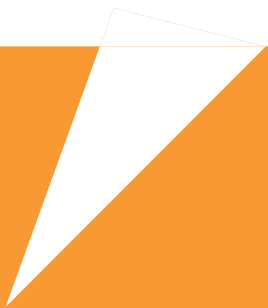




**STOP**

**THE**

**BULLYING**



# Introduction



**American Muslims are America's most ethnically diverse faith community, constituting a population of 3.45 million.<sup>1</sup>**

The community is comprised of many groups, including Asian American/Pacific Islander, African American/Black, Middle Eastern, North American, and Hispanic. Despite this diversity, many share a common experience of facing Islamophobia, the prejudice against or hatred of Islam/Muslims. According to the most recent American Muslim Poll released by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), Muslims are the faith group most likely to experience interpersonal discrimination when interacting with others on social media, at work, or when interacting with strangers in public spaces.<sup>2</sup> They are also the most likely to face religious discrimination when interacting with law enforcement or when seeking health services.<sup>3</sup> These events affect American Muslims of all ages, including Muslim students who are targets of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hate at school. This sixth biennial bullying report published by CAIR-CA evaluates the current school climate for California Muslim students between the ages of 11 and 18. Since 2013, CAIR-CA has distributed a bullying survey every two

years to understand how Islamophobia manifests itself in the California school environment through bullying and discrimination from peers, teachers, administrators, and other adult school personnel.

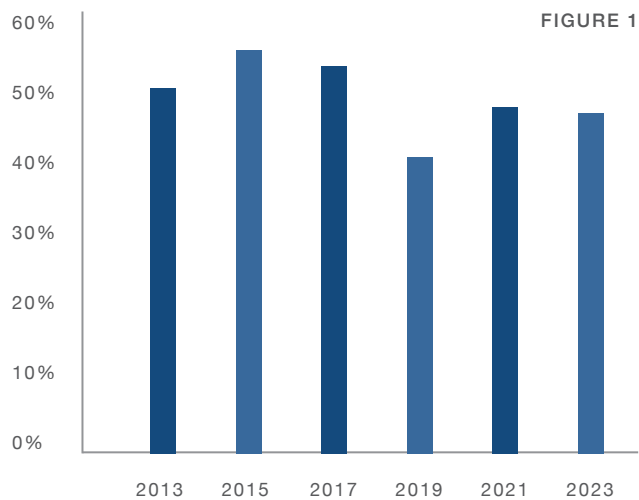
Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Bullying may be physical (hitting, kicking, spitting), verbal (teasing, name-calling, threatening), emotional (spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, intimidating), or cyber (posting hateful/threatening messages online). Even though any student can be a victim of bullying, students perceived as different from their peers are at a higher risk than others<sup>4</sup>. School bullying has a real impact on victims and can lead to victims fearing harm to themselves or their property. It can cause victims to experience detrimental effects to their physical or mental health, cause victims' academic performance to suffer, and interfere with their ability to fully participate and benefit from school activities.<sup>5</sup>

While schools should be a safe environment for students to learn, feel supported, and be empowered, CAIR-CA’s surveys have shown that, on average, over the past ten years, nearly half of all Muslim students reported being bullied because of their faith (see Figure 1). These numbers are more than twice the reported national average of 20%.<sup>6</sup>

These high levels of Islamophobic bullying do not occur in a vacuum and are often reflective of larger political and social trends. For example, in 2017, Muslim students reported one of the highest levels of Islamophobic bullying in CAIR-CA’s ten years of survey data collection. Unsurprisingly, this was also the year of the Trump Administration’s Muslim Travel Ban, an executive order that, among other things, banned foreign nationals from several predominately Muslim countries from visiting the United States and suspended entry for all Syrian refugees. The precursor, signing, and implementation of this executive order was accompanied by Islamophobic and anti-Muslim rhetoric by elected officials, including President Trump, who publicly stated that a “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” was necessary. CAIR-CA’s Civil Rights report shows that in the years leading up to Trump’s election, hate crimes against Muslims surged by 584%.<sup>7</sup> After Trump’s Muslim Travel Ban, hate crimes against Muslims spiked by 91% in the first half of 2017, making it one of the worst years for anti-Muslim hate crimes.<sup>8</sup>

In 2023, anti-Muslim rhetoric and events have continued to hinder the ability of young American Muslims to feel safe in their schools, neighborhoods, and places of worship. During the month of August, a man was charged with a hate crime for allegedly trying to run over Muslim community members while yelling racial slurs and threatening to “shoot and bomb” them.<sup>9</sup> In July, a man vandalized the Islamic Society of Simi Valley’s sign by breaking its letters off before leaving the scene.<sup>10</sup> Another hate crime occurred in the month of April, where a man vandalized the entrance of the Islamic Center of Southern California with anti-Islamic hate words.<sup>11</sup> These are just a few of many hate crimes and incidents that American Muslims continue

to experience just in California. According to the California Department of Justice, hate crime events in California have increased by 145.7% in the last ten years.<sup>12</sup> In the past year alone, hate crime events involving religious bias increased by 39%.<sup>13</sup> Students, unfortunately, are no exception to the rising hate across our state, and CAIR-CA’s recent survey shows that nearly half of Muslim students reported being bullied at school because of their religion.



Given the rise in hate in California and Muslim students’ continued struggles against Islamophobic bullying, school districts, educators, parents, and community organizations have a responsibility to address and prevent these incidents from continuing to happen. These incidents do not only affect the victims and their families, but the Muslim community at large.

CAIR-CA’s Center for the Prevention of Hate and Bullying (CPHB) that was established in 2021 will proactively address incidents of hate that target marginalized communities across the state in schools and public life. The CPHB is working to strategically expand CAIR-CA’s efforts from our legal, policy, organizing, and media perspective to work with school districts, parents, students, and other partners to address hate in schools through training, education, advocacy, and continued data collection.





## Methodology

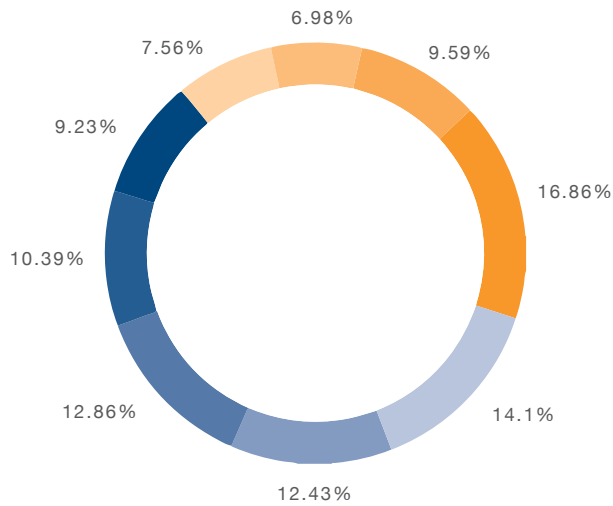
CAIR-CA's 2023 report provides the results from a survey distributed between August 2022 and May 2023 by the four CAIR-CA offices covering the Greater Los Angeles, Sacramento Valley / Central California, San Diego, and San Francisco Bay Area. The survey examined Muslim students' experience with bullying, how they felt about their school environment, and whether they received any discrimination from teachers, school administrators, and other adult school personnel. 1,376 individuals responded to our survey. 1,135 of the respondents were eligible to take the survey in that they were: 1) between 11-18 years old; 2) Muslim; 3) attended school in California; and 4) attended either a public school, non-Islamic private school, or charter school.

Surveys were collected through two methods: 1) surveys were distributed to student attendees to complete in-person at various Know Your Rights presentations on bullying across the state; and 2) QR codes linking to the survey were distributed through CAIR-CA's various outreach efforts both in-person and online. CAIR-CA utilizes its network of partners,

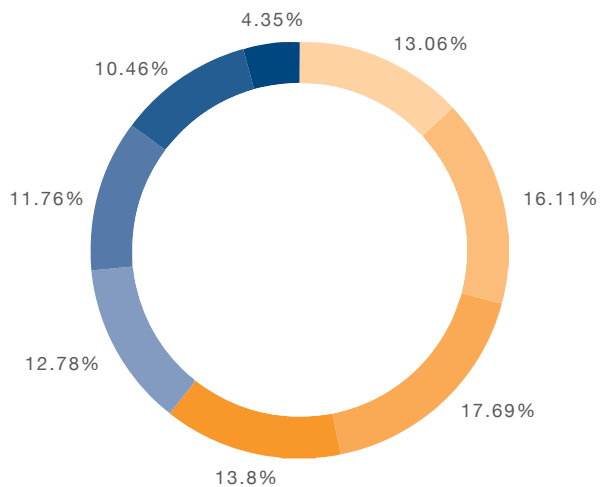
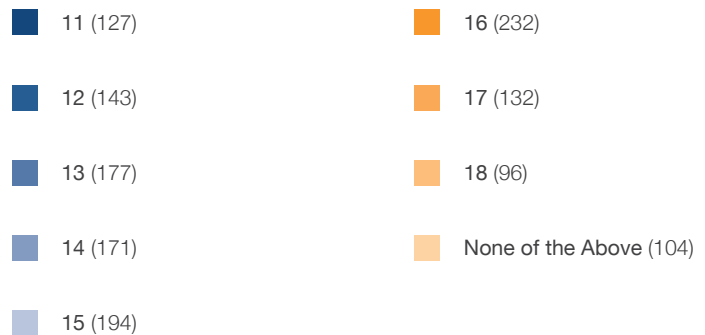
mosques, religious centers, and community-based organizations as well as various methods of communication to conduct outreach and request responses to the survey. These methods include announcements at large community gatherings such as Jumu'ah (large communal prayers held on Fridays); tabling and distributing flyers at Jumu'ah; utilizing community newsletters, email lists, and ethnic media services; and posting on websites, social media platforms, and WhatsApp.

The survey consisted of 26 questions and was divided into three sections. The first section asked for respondents' demographic information. The second section requested information about the type of bullying and discrimination respondents experienced at school as either the victim or bystander. The third section asked respondents how they perceived their school environment and whether adults in their school had engaged in Islamophobic behavior.

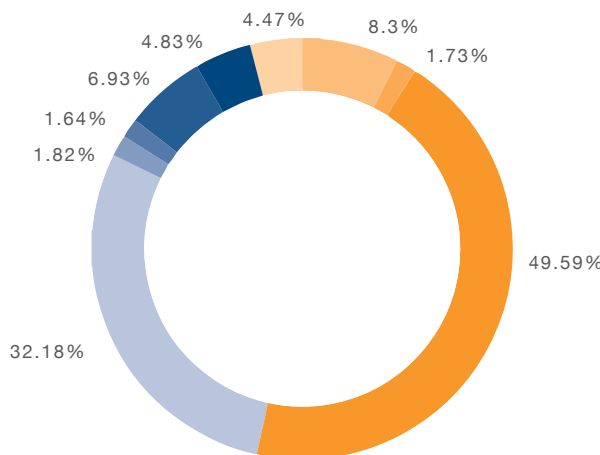
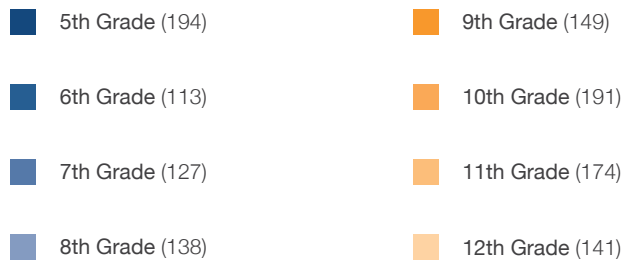
# Demographics



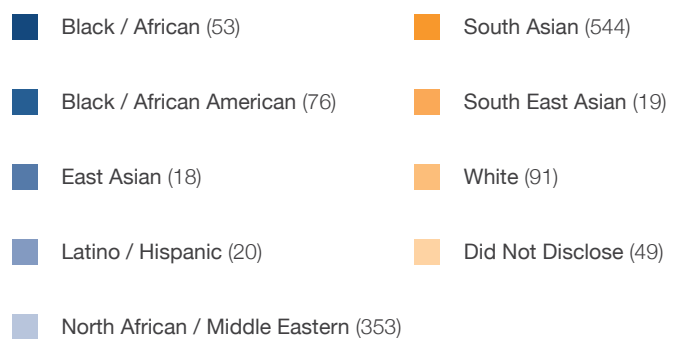
## Respondents By Age

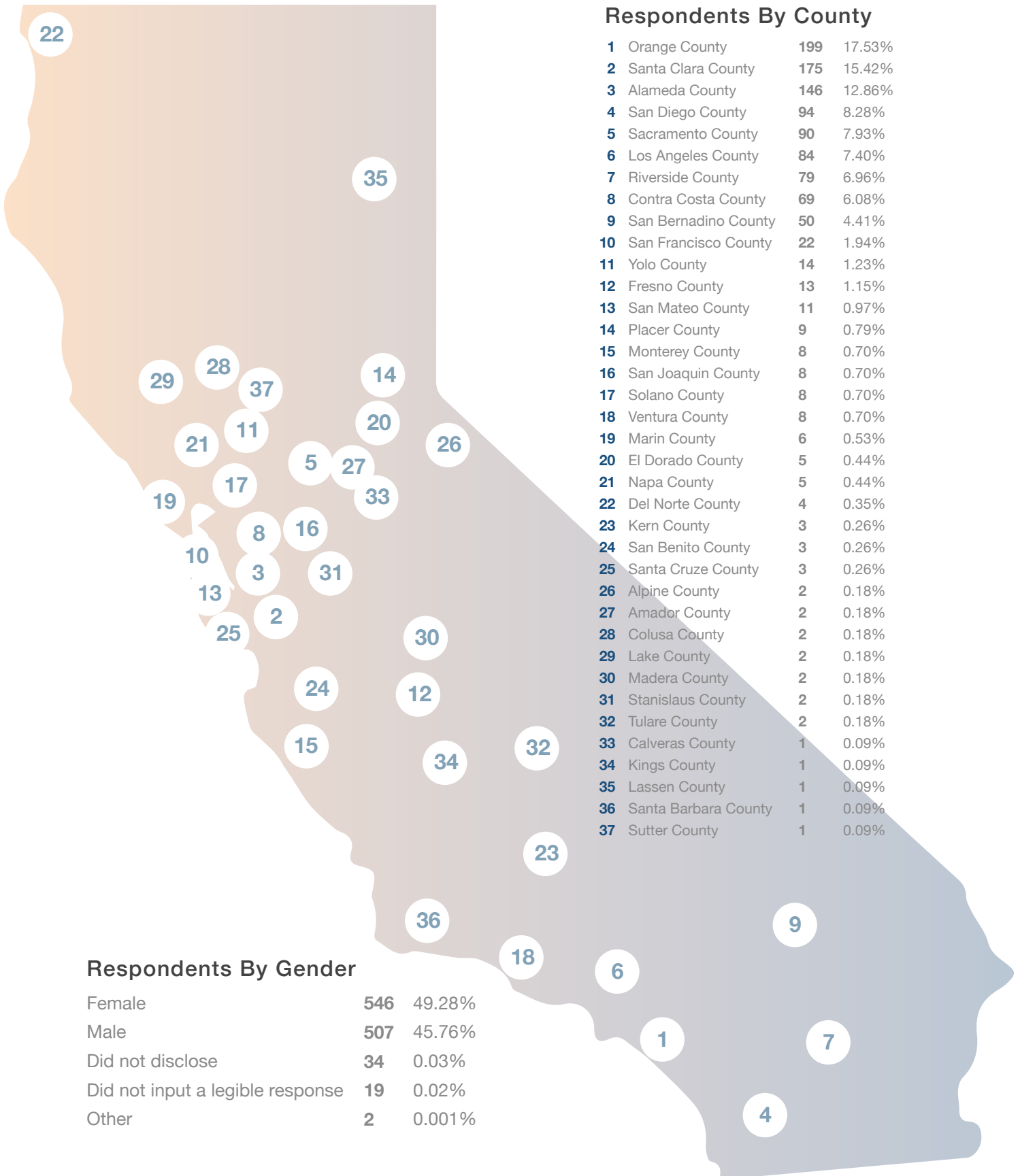


## Respondents By Grade



## Respondents By Race/Ethnicity





### Respondents By County

1	Orange County	199	17.53%
2	Santa Clara County	175	15.42%
3	Alameda County	146	12.86%
4	San Diego County	94	8.28%
5	Sacramento County	90	7.93%
6	Los Angeles County	84	7.40%
7	Riverside County	79	6.96%
8	Contra Costa County	69	6.08%
9	San Bernadino County	50	4.41%
10	San Francisco County	22	1.94%
11	Yolo County	14	1.23%
12	Fresno County	13	1.15%
13	San Mateo County	11	0.97%
14	Placer County	9	0.79%
15	Monterey County	8	0.70%
16	San Joaquin County	8	0.70%
17	Solano County	8	0.70%
18	Ventura County	8	0.70%
19	Marin County	6	0.53%
20	El Dorado County	5	0.44%
21	Napa County	5	0.44%
22	Del Norte County	4	0.35%
23	Kern County	3	0.26%
24	San Benito County	3	0.26%
25	Santa Cruze County	3	0.26%
26	Alpine County	2	0.18%
27	Amador County	2	0.18%
28	Colusa County	2	0.18%
29	Lake County	2	0.18%
30	Madera County	2	0.18%
31	Stanislaus County	2	0.18%
32	Tulare County	2	0.18%
33	Calveras County	1	0.09%
34	Kings County	1	0.09%
35	Lassen County	1	0.09%
36	Santa Barbara County	1	0.09%
37	Sutter County	1	0.09%

### Respondents By Gender

Female	546	49.28%
Male	507	45.76%
Did not disclose	34	0.03%
Did not input a legible response	19	0.02%
Other	2	0.001%

# “You Are A Threat”

By Hatem Bazian, PhD

“You are a threat” was a school’s principal utterance to a 14-year-old Muslim kid, while the words and phrases “bomber,” “terrorist,” “go back to your country,” “go KYS [kill yourself] you Muslim,” were directed towards a 13-year-old girl. These are just some of the many incidents Muslim students encounter at school from their peers or school adults. Muslim kids’ school experiences are not isolated incidents but part of a persistent bullying crisis impacting marginalized students. The data from CAIR-CA’s recent survey is consistent with prior years, as nearly half of Muslim school-age kids (11-18) reported being bullied at school by another student because they are Muslim, and 25% of these students reported being subjected to Islamophobic comments or actions by school adults. Of the students who reported being bullied, East Asian, Black/African, and North African/Middle Eastern students reported being bullied at a higher rate than other students. The experiences reported by these students reflect America’s historical failure to adequately address and remedy structural racism and the macro-level trends of increased hate towards immigrants and racial and religious minorities.

The bullying experienced by these students is reflective of the systematic racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia that America has yet to fully confront and address. America’s efforts to confront racism since the 1960s as a result of the civil rights movement with legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was always offset by steady covert, reactionary, and systematic efforts to keep racism alive and kicking in the shadows. More recently, over the past 15 years following the 2008 election, overt racism in American

society has steadily resurfaced, accompanied by the normalization of everyday Islamophobia.

Islamophobia, a type of racism, takes many forms, including bullying in schools and social media harassment of young Muslims. Although Islam is a religious identity, Muslims in the United States have undergone a process of racialization. Racialization is a process by which racial categories are socially constructed and created and given meaning in laws, policy, media, and imagery.<sup>14</sup> This process uses a catch-all “racial category” to signify differences among groups of people.<sup>15</sup> For American Muslims, the racialization of Islam has created a category of people who despite their actual racial, ethnic, and national origin diversity, are seen as a homogenous group of inferior “others.” These “others” subscribe to a way of life that is antithetical to “Western” ideals, culture, and religion and are “threats” that need to be handled through Islamophobia, racial profiling, violence, and exclusionary laws and policies.

Thus, any outward indicators of connection to the “Muslim” group, whether it be outwardly religious appearances or acts such as wearing a hijab, growing a beard, wearing traditional garb, or praying in public, or the perception that an individual is Muslim because of their physical features, can place an individual in this group and subject them to real-world harmful consequences. For Muslim students, that can mean being subjected to hateful bullying, Islamophobic comments or lesson plans from teachers, and victims of violence.

**I was locked out of my classroom in middle school because one of my classmates did not want a “terrorist” in his classroom. I also had a girl tug on my hair in the girl’s locker room to figure out if it was “real” as I wear a hijab. These made me feel less safe to attend that school.**

- 18-year-old South Asian Female. Public School, Fairfield.

Exacerbating the challenges that Muslim students face because of constant Islamophobia is the rise of overt racism over the past several years. This racism has targeted marginalized communities such as the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, the Black-American community, and the Latino-American community. Muslim students from these communities not only have to deal with Islamophobia but also must grapple with the possibility of hate targeted at them for being members of these ethnic communities. Over the past several years, the 2016 and 2020 election cycles, the movement for racial equality and police accountability that was a response to George Floyd's murder, and the COVID pandemic unleashed an avalanche of blatant verbal, physical, and social media racist attacks. The national data shows a constant increase in hate crimes against racial and religious minorities. According to the 2021 FBI Hates Crime Report, there was a 168% rise in incidents targeting anti-Asians, a 40% increase in anti-Muslim incidents, a 14% increase in anti-Black incidents, and a 35% increase in hate crimes against anti-Hispanic individuals, marking the highest recorded levels of hate crimes to date.<sup>16</sup>



Muslim students are often at the intersection of these various forms of hatred and frequently have to deal with biases against them based on their race, religion, and national origin. With Muslims being the most ethnically diverse community,<sup>17</sup> they experience multilayered otherization as a racial minority (Black, Asian, Arab, Latino, Native American, etc.), a religious minority in a Christian majority society, and recent immigrants/refugees or individuals born to a family of first-generation immigrants/ refugees,

who had to make their path in a country that has a historical orientalist antagonism toward Islam and Muslims.

Unfortunately, Muslim students in California are not immune to these trends. Although California is known for its diversity and has taken steps toward fostering inclusivity, challenges persist, particularly in the realm of under-researched, underreported, and underfunded problems of intersectional bullying targeting Muslim students. For example, in CAIR-CA's recent survey, nearly 60% of the students who identified as Black/African reported feeling unsafe, unwelcome, or uncomfortable at school because of their Muslim identity. While these students reported feeling this way because of their religious identity, these students have an intersection of identities that could be the target of racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia – all of which could have contributed to them reporting these high numbers. In ISPU's 2018 American Muslim Poll, Muslim Black Americans (18%) were more likely to report experiencing racial discrimination "regularly" than young or nonBlack Muslims (less than 10%).<sup>18</sup>

All sectors must take racist and Islamophobic bullying in schools seriously, including teachers, school principals, school boards across the state, the Department of Education, legislative bodies, and the governor's office. What is needed are appropriate training programs in partnership with Muslim civil rights organizations and specialists in the Islamophobia studies field to develop proper strategies to counter racism and bigotry in schools. In addition, ample resources must be set aside to research and investigate the bullying predicament and arrive at multipronged and multiyear strategies to reverse the upward trend.

Lack of action has consequences, and no kid should walk through the school's gates and feel marginalized, demonized, or bullied for their identity. The responsibility for racism, bigotry, and Islamophobia-free school and classroom environments rests with the leadership at every level. It starts at the top and reaches all the way to the teacher standing daily in front of the students.



# Addressing Bullying and Discrimination Against Female Muslim Students in U.S. Schools

By Dr. Rania Awaad, MD; Kubra Tor-Cabuk, MA; and Neshwa Rajeh, MPH



The United States is witnessing a growth in its Muslim population, composed of immigrants, American born Muslims, and converts. It is projected that by 2050, Muslims will have grown from 0.9% of the total US population to over 2% of the U.S. population; making it the second-largest religious group in the country.<sup>19</sup> Amidst this demographic shift, little attention has been given to the experiences of Muslim women, who navigate complex identities encompassing gender, religious affiliation, race-ethnic identity, and immigration status. As a result, these multifaceted identities increase their vulnerability to encountering various psychological and social obstacles within the US context.

The anti-Muslim sentiment and increased rates of discrimination against Muslims in the US puts these communities under constant

stress affecting their mental health.<sup>20</sup> In the US, discrimination against Muslims occurs in a variety of contexts, including schools, workplaces, housing, and medical settings.<sup>21-25</sup> Moreover, Muslim women, who hold several marginalized identities including but not limited to gender, race-ethnicity, and religious affiliation, encounter additional hurdles within US society compared to their male counterparts. For instance, Abu-Ras et al. (2018) indicates a significant difference between Muslim men and women in

**They would make fun of me, someone even hitting me because of my hijab, call me names, spread rumors about me, and look at me with disgusted looks. When I was trying to be nice to them, they would try to point out any of my faults just to have more reason to make fun of me.**

- 12-year-old North African/Middle Eastern Female. Charter School, Irvine

perceived religious discrimination.<sup>26</sup> The choice to wear the hijab (veil/head covering) can also make some Muslim women more susceptible to discrimination compared with Muslim men.<sup>27</sup> It is highlighted in previous research that Muslim women are a unique subset of the general US population and, therefore, require specific attention.<sup>28</sup>

same view. Additionally, 55% of Muslim women shared that they had personally encountered at least one instance of discrimination in the past year, whereas the corresponding figure for Muslim men was 42%.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) civil rights report from 2017 highlighted that the headscarf/ hijab ranked as one of the leading catalysts for anti-Muslim incidents.<sup>31</sup> Adult Muslim women aren't the only ones impacted; female Muslim students are also susceptible to religious discrimination and anti-Muslim incidents in the form of bullying.



Bullying, as a form of discrimination, manifests in various settings, and one such context is educational institutions.<sup>32</sup> According to Aroian, research indicates that the majority of discrimination cases described by adolescents, specifically seven out of nine, took place within school environments.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, their study identified that Muslim American high school girls face harassment due to their traditional clothing. This aligns with the most recent report from CAIR-CA, which underscores a greater incidence of bullying among female students (49%

Muslim women expressed a more negative perspective regarding their position in US society compared to Muslim men.<sup>29</sup> Among Muslim women, 68% believed that US media portrayal of Muslims was biased, whereas 52% of Muslim men held the

compared to 42% in male students). It is noteworthy that almost 60% of female students reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at school because of their Muslim identity (compared to 32% in male students). Of the female students reporting harassment, 19%



Male  
42%



Female  
49%

**49% of female students reported being bullied by another student because they are Muslim; while 42% of male students reported being bullied by another student because they are Muslim.**




Male  
32%



Female  
67%

**Nearly 60% of female students reported feeling unsafe, unwelcome, or uncomfortable at school because of their Muslim identity; while 32% of male students reported that.**

disclosed that they had been absent from school due to the hostile atmosphere. In contrast to earlier CAIR-CA reports, there has been an increase in the occurrence of bullying directed at female Muslim students in the current report, rising from 44% to 49%. This alarming trend highlights the critical necessity of thoroughly investigating the ordeals faced by these students. To effectively tackle this issue, educators and school administrators should actively promote open communication and raise awareness about the distinct needs of female Muslim students. Moreover, there is a pressing need for educational initiatives aimed at adults, including teachers and families, to challenge and confront biased attitudes.



**32% of female students who wear a hijab reported their hijab was tugged, pulled, or offensively touched by another student.**

Considering that religion constitutes the most prominent basis of social identity among Muslim adolescents residing in Western contexts, it is imperative to establish an atmosphere of inclusivity.<sup>34-35</sup> Based on the findings of the current report, 73% of students express their comfort in openly embracing their Muslim identity.

To support female Muslim students, community organizations and religious centers should offer specialized programs aimed at enhancing their empowerment. These initiatives should focus on recognizing signs of discrimination and reporting incidents. This report highlights the urgent need to address these unique challenges and strongly urges teachers and school leaders to take the initiative in making positive changes in schools. Recognizing 32% of female respondents who wear a hijab reported their hijab was tugged, pulled, or offensively touched by another student. 32% the significance of fostering an inclusive and supportive environment, these institutions should actively host

community workshops tailored to empower female students in several critical dimensions. Firstly, these workshops should aim at cultivating a positive self-concept and fostering a favorable view of the hijab, acknowledging its cultural and religious significance. Secondly, providing a robust support system and access to resources, including counseling services and mentorship programs, can significantly enhance female Muslim students' resilience and mental health. Lastly, workshops should equip Muslim students with the knowledge and strategies required to effectively report incidents of discrimination or harassment in school settings, promoting a safer and more equitable educational environment. By addressing these multifaceted aspects, community organizations and Islamic religious centers can contribute significantly to the empowerment and well-being of female Muslim students, aligning with the broader goal of nurturing a more inclusive and harmonious society.

# Islamophobia And Its Impact On The Mental Health Of Students

By Dr. Altaf Hussain, PhD, MSW

Parents and teachers often teach children to shield themselves from insults by repeating the phrase, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but can never hurt me.” As research has demonstrated repeatedly, nothing could be further from the truth, and in fact, while fractured and broken bones in children heal at a remarkable pace, what is painfully clear is that harsh words and insults wound and scar children, sometimes through adulthood.<sup>36</sup> For the purposes of this report, the focus is on Islamophobia and its impact on the mental health of Muslim students and the potential long-term effects of experiencing such bullying. Muscari notes that the deleterious impact of bullying in school includes psychological maladjustment, low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety, “all of which are problems that may carry into adulthood.”<sup>37</sup>

**Bullying never lets me focus at school. I always worry about what people would do to me.**

- 13-year-old South Asian Female. Public School, San Jose

Bullying is not a new phenomenon in schools. For Muslim students in particular, bullying took on a new form following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. This resulted in incessant and regrettable verbal attacks on Islam and Muslims by elected officials, leaders of other religious traditions, and yes, school administrators and teachers. In 2023, two decades after the terrorist attacks, Muslim children are still routinely exposed to slurs and insults due to their faith. Classmates, teachers, and administrators engage in Islamophobic attacks, and Muslim students are left to fend for themselves, having to defend against accusations that their religion promotes violence, that their adherence to



Islamic beliefs and practices puts them on a path to radicalization, and that their religion’s teachings are antithetical to American values.<sup>38</sup> Islamophobia in the classroom can cause Muslim students to internalize negative stereotypes about Islam, diminishing their self-esteem.<sup>39</sup> Also, Muslims can begin to experience an overwhelming feeling that individuals outside of Islam hate them for their faith, making social interactions complicated and difficult.

Such toxicity in the classroom, in the hallways of the school, and on the playground has an extremely detrimental effect on the mental health of Muslim students. CAIR-CA’s latest survey shows that 34% of the students reported that Islamophobic bullying negatively impacted their physical, mental,

or emotional well-being. Students' best waking moments are expected to be spent on learning and developing their identities as proud Muslims and Americans. Instead, they may experience intense feelings of fear, sadness, low self-esteem, and an inability to focus. All these various negative mental health effects can contribute to the poor academic performance of Muslim students in schools, which can lead to lifelong impacts on their lives.

Children who are consistently bullied are at a higher risk of anxiety disorder, depression, psychotic experiences, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts in younger adulthood and middle adulthood (which is the age group of 18-50).<sup>40</sup> Still, those whose bullying ended during childhood demonstrated lingering effects on health, including negative effects on self-worth and quality of life years after the bullying ended.<sup>41</sup> This victimization has also been linked to school absenteeism, which can increase the risk of failure to complete high school or college and raise the risk of lower income, educational qualifications, financial management skills, and job performance.<sup>42</sup> In addition, bullying can severely detrimentally influence socialization by causing bullied individuals to have a more difficult time making and keeping friends, living with partners, and having social support.<sup>43</sup> In CAIR-CA's recent survey, nearly half of the respondents reported being bullied at school by a student because of their faith. Considering the many immensely harmful short-term and long-term impacts of bullying on students, these Muslim students' mental and physical health is in danger.

Furthermore, Muslim students frequently have an intersection of identities, which causes them to be targeted by other students and adults. Muslim students often stand out due to their race, their names (which are often derived from Arabic and other languages commonly spoken among Muslim households of immigrant origin), the national origin of their parents, and their either real or perceived immigrant or refugee status. Carola Suarez-Orozco & Marcelo Suarez-Orozco and subsequent contemporary studies have researched this impact

on mental health and academic performance among children of immigrants.<sup>44-45</sup> Schools do not exist in a vacuum, and whenever the national rhetoric turns against immigrants and refugees, students of immigrant and refugee backgrounds are bound to be targets of bullying by their peers and, unfortunately, also by some of their teachers and administrators.<sup>46</sup> Muslim students, a significant percentage of whom have immigrant and refugee backgrounds, suffer the consequences of both anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic bigotry.

**I've thought about stopping wearing my hijab, or stuff like that. I've cried myself to sleep a few times for the bullying.**

- 13-year-old South Asian Female. Public School, Mill Valley

The path forward is clear, and school boards and policymakers need to work together to improve the school climate for all children, particularly children who are targets of bullying due to their religious affiliation. Policies cannot be developed without considering outside events or influences, rather, they should be based on evidence gathered from both cross-sectional (to grasp trends) and longitudinal studies. As noted above, there is evidence for lingering and sometimes lifelong detrimental effects of childhood experiences of bullying, so longitudinal studies would offer insights into how children experience bullying and how the process of developing an Islamic identity is impacted due to experiencing Islamophobia as a student. Studies, policies, and changes at every level of the school system must be conducted to secure the present and future of mental health for Muslim students in America.

# For Educators

By Dr. Sara Dean



Every child enters the classroom full of hope, worthy, and endowed with their own unique gifts. Unfortunately, American Muslim youth are the second most bullied group in American schools. Bullying may lead to poor academic outcomes, physical injury, social-emotional challenges, negative behaviors, and increased risk for suicide.

School bullying prevention policies often focus on peer bullying. However, CAIR-CA's recent bullying survey reveals that one quarter (25%) of surveyed American Muslim students in California reported being bullied by school adults, including teachers, administrators, and staff. Most respondents reported experiencing significant anti-Muslim bias by school adults. Additionally, twenty percent (20%) of these students' respondents believe that lesson plans about Islam and Muslims are unfair and negatively biased.

Why are American Muslim students feeling misrepresented and disempowered by the adults in their schools? Like most people, the behaviors of school adults are influenced by biases. Some biases, like the positive bias for babies, lead to increased human connection and are favorable for society. Other biases lead to disconnection and harm our society. Anti-Muslim bias in classrooms disconnects American Muslim students from the school community and decreases societal cohesion.

Our brains may be wired to develop biases for self-preservation because early humans had to quickly categorize an object or circumstance as "safe" or "dangerous" with limited data. Today, many forms of media influence how we subconsciously categorize people and develop our biases. As detailed in the book *Reel Bad Arabs* by Jack Shaheen, negative depictions of Muslims and Arabs

in popular media have systematically propagated anti-Muslim bias for decades.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, biased reporting in the news media disproportionately portrays negative stories with negative language instead of positive stories with positive language about American Muslims. Anti-Muslim bias leads people to subtly categorize Muslims as inherently more violent, less civilized, and less capable.

Like other students, it is not the American Muslim student's primary responsibility to mitigate negative biases that school adults and peers may harbor. What should teachers, administrators, and schools do to address anti-Muslim bias, foster more inclusive classrooms, and empower Muslim American students alongside their peers?

### 1 Professional Development

Through professional development, teachers, administrators, and staff must develop bias awareness and media literacy. Bias awareness and media literacy will empower teachers to lead classroom discussions that are more inclusive and welcoming of diverse student perspectives. For example, age-appropriate lesson plans regarding 9/11 would not isolate Muslims and Muslim students, but would invite students of all backgrounds to see themselves as fellow Americans seeking a critical understanding of this tragic event.

### 2 Cultural and Religious Literacy

It is critical that in teaching lessons about Islam and Muslims, Muslim voices are included. There are ample curriculum materials and educational cultural experiences created and offered by American Muslims to teach more fairly about Islam and Muslims.

### 3 Inclusion of Diverse Voices

Lastly, as increasing political partisanship (negative force) and increasing diversity (positive force) lead to culture wars within public education, teachers, administrators, and school staff must develop their understanding of the diversity of beliefs, practices, and challenges within their

student populations. Without this understanding, educators and administrators may evaluate their students' beliefs or behaviors through their own framework and arrive at erroneous conclusions, further fracturing our schools and communities.

As all students continue to face challenges, teachers, administrators, and school staff must intentionally develop relationships across different community groups while addressing negative biases, developing media literacy, and honoring the First Amendment through cultural and religious literacy to cultivate classrooms that fully support our Muslim students alongside their peers. All students, including American Muslims, should graduate from school feeling hopeful, worthy, and empowered with their gifts to positively contribute to their communities.

*This writing represents the individual views of Dr. Sara Deen and does not represent the views of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District.*





# For School Districts

By Alkamalee (Al) Jabbar

In the diverse tapestry of American society, schools are meant to be sanctuaries of learning and personal growth for every child, regardless of their background or beliefs. However, a disquieting undercurrent of prejudice has surfaced for years, affecting the educational experiences of Muslim students across the nation. The emergence of Islamophobia has infiltrated the corridors and classrooms of our educational institutions. This toxic phenomenon is fueled by a complex interplay of political dynamics and a distorted portrayal of Islam within the media.

CAIR-CA's recent survey has shed light on Muslim students' distressing challenges due to Islamophobia. Unfortunately, almost half of Muslim students reported experiencing bullying at school solely because of their Muslim identity. Beyond the scars of bullying, nearly half of Muslim students admitted to feeling unsafe, unwelcome, or uncomfortable at school due to their Muslim identity. This pervasive sense of insecurity hinders their educational development and undermines the fundamental principles of inclusivity that underpin our education system.

As a former school board member committed to fostering a safe and inclusive educational environment, I am acutely aware of the urgent need for action. We cannot allow our schools to become breeding grounds for hatred and prejudice. Instead, we must make a concerted effort to ensure that every student enjoys a positive and nurturing school experience, regardless of their background.



It is imperative that school districts and state education departments take immediate steps to address the pervasive issue of Islamophobia-driven bullying.

**1. Implement comprehensive, clear anti-bullying policies and procedures that go beyond minimal state regulations.**

Schools must ensure that students, staff, and parents are aware of and understand these policies. They should be clear and include a purpose statement stating that any form of bullying is unacceptable, whether it is from a student or a school adult. Policies should also implement procedures for how schools and teachers should intervene when these bullying incidents occur.

**2. Ensure that incidents of Islamophobia and other hate-based incidents are swiftly and effectively addressed.**

School districts and teachers should be trained and provided with the resources to properly address any incidents of Islamophobia immediately and follow up as needed. No incident should be ignored or dismissed as “kids being kids.”

**3. Educate students, parents, and staff on how to report such incidents.**

Students should be educated on the different types of bullying and what steps they can take to report such incidents. Parents should be informed on what are the different signs of bullying and how they can be involved if their child is a victim of bullying. Schools should also have a procedure in place for students, parents, and staff to anonymously report bullying incidents without fear of retaliation.

**4. Specialized bullying intervention services should be made available for those students who require additional support.**

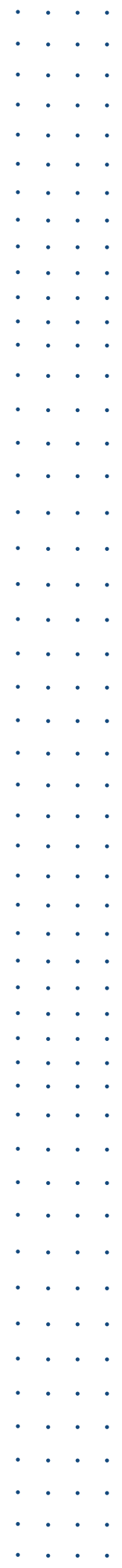
Due to the impact of bullying, counseling and mental health services should be provided to students who are victims of bullying or were involved in a bullying incident. It is essential to follow up and ensure these students get the support they need.

**5. School districts’ curricula must be reviewed and revised to ensure that they are truly inclusive, reflecting the diversity of our society.**

Schools must include and implement an inclusive Ethnic Studies curriculum for all students. Ethnic Studies is a form of culturally relevant pedagogy that speaks to the histories and experiences of historically marginalized students and their communities. These courses help create school environments where students feel seen, understood, represented, respected, and welcomed.

As a Trustee, I greatly valued the perspectives and contributions of parents in our district. I encourage parents to proactively bring incidents to the attention of School Board Members and respective Superintendents as a crucial first step in combating incidents of hate at schools and to ensure these incidents are properly addressed in various ways. For example, as a Trustee, I was made aware of an incident involving a teacher’s verbal abuse towards a Muslim student. We organized sensitivity training for the teacher and invited a local *imam* (Muslim religious leader) to enlighten the district on the principles of Islam. In another distressing incident where a student pulled off a classmate’s hijab, we took disciplinary action and facilitated a dialogue involving the parents of both students, emphasizing the significance of wearing a hijab and the impact of the actions on the victim and her family. Subsequently, the Muslim Student Association at that school organized a hijab day, educating the school community and amplifying awareness across the district.

There are commendable efforts in various school districts to combat Islamophobia. By celebrating diverse cultures, religions, and backgrounds, we can collectively dismantle the barriers of misunderstanding that fuel Islamophobia, paving the way for more inclusive and compassionate schools and society.



# For Parents

**1****Maintain an open line of communication with your child.**

Always check in with your child by asking how their day at school was. Talk about bullying in a general way before your child is involved in a bullying incident. For example, if they have seen any bullying at school and how they handled it. These conversations help build trust and make it easier for your child to share with you when something actually happens.

**2****Be aware of the signs of bullying and discrimination.**

Behavior changes may include not wanting to attend school, avoiding social situations, difficulty sleeping, or decreased self-esteem. Physical changes may include unexplained injuries such as bruises or scrapes, frequent headaches or stomachaches, or lost or destroyed personal belongings

**3****Immediately report any incident of bullying to the school.**

Review your child's school's bullying policies and follow the procedures for reporting it. If a school or district fails to post its anti-bullying policies online, they are in violation of California's anti-bullying laws. Once you report the incident to the school and district, the school is required to investigate and fix the problem. Following up is crucial to ensure that your child gets the support they need from the school.

**4****Incidents of bullying and discrimination should also be reported to your local CAIR-CA office.**

By reporting to CAIR-CA, our civil rights departments can assess the situation, provide advice, and potentially represent the bullying victim and their family to deal with the school and advocate for the rights of the victim. Furthermore, by reporting these incidents, we can increase accurate estimates of bullying among Muslim students and ensure that our schools stay safe and welcoming for all.

# Resources

## Report Bullying Incidents to CAIR-CA

- [CAIR-SFBA](#)
- [CAIR-LA](#)
- [CAIR-SD](#)
- [CAIR-SV/CC](#)

## Know Your Rights as a Student

- [CAIR's Guide to Addressing Bullying and Bias in Schools](#)
- [CAIR-CA: Know Your Rights for California Students and Parents](#)
- [CAIR: Your Rights as a Student](#)

## California Laws Relating to Bullying

- California Education Code § 234 - 234.5 (Safe Place to Learn Act)
- California Education Code §32261 - 32262 (Interagency School Safety Demonstration Act of 1985)
- California Education Code §32265
- California Education Code §32270
- California Education Code §32282
- California Education Code §32283

## Resources for Educators

- [Insights on Research and Evidence-Based Best Practices from the National Interfaith Anti-Bullying Summit](#)
- [Teaching September 11, 2001 in Diverse Classrooms](#)

## General Mental Health Resources

- [Khalil Center](#)
- [Institute for Muslim Mental Health](#)
- [Ruh Care](#)

## California Mental Health Resources

- [Access CA Services](#)
- [Maristan Mental Health Clinic](#)
- [Muslim Therapists: Bay Area \(California\)](#)
- [Muslim Therapists: Southern \(California\)](#)
- [Rahma Center](#)

## Crisis Support

- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline \(USA\)](#)  
📞 Call/Text: 988
- [Crisis Text Line \(USA\)](#)  
📞 Text: HOME to 741741

## Muslim-Specific Crisis Hotlines

- [Amala Hopeline \(USA\) - Muslim Mental Health Helpline](#)  
📞 Call/Text: 855-95-AMALA (26252)
- [Naseeha-Muslim Helpline](#): *Provides a confidential helpline for young Muslims to receive immediate, anonymous, and confidential support over the phone from 9AM-9PM (PST), 7 days a week.*  
📞 Call: 1-866-627-3342

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## Our Mission

To enhance understanding of Islam, protect civil liberties, promote justice, and empower American Muslims.

## Our Vision

To be a leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding.

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