

Written evidence from Mr Mohamad Al-Mail [GIS0004]

This submission addresses the Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry into gendered Islamophobia and is made by Mohamad Al-Mail, a researcher in political theory and a specialist in Islamic movements. He holds a Master's degree in International Relations from Middlesex University, serves as the Chancellor of the Upper Hand Organisation, and is a member of Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs) as well as the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES).

This submission highlights the specific issues of gendered Islamophobia and its impact on Muslim women, aiming to encourage greater engagement with Muslim communities in policy development to ensure their perspectives are considered.

1. Gendered Islamophobia cannot be effectively tackled through frameworks that pathologise Islamic norms; rather, true empowerment for Muslim women is rooted in the preservation of religious autonomy. Acknowledging this, it becomes evident that imposing assimilationist policies only serves to undermine Islamic values; therefore, the resolution of gendered Islamophobia cannot be achieved by dismantling Islam itself.
2. The concept of intersectionality risks fragmenting Muslim identity into competing categories such as gender, race, and class; this approach undermines communal solidarity by prioritising individual grievances over collective religious and cultural values. Policies must avoid artificially dividing Muslim communities; instead, they should focus on strengthening shared identity and fostering a sense of unity that transcends individual differences.
3. By portraying Muslim women as passive victims of their faith or culture, these efforts reinforce the damaging notion that they require external 'emancipation'; instead of addressing the systemic barriers they encounter, this perpetuates a cycle of misunderstanding.
4. Muslim women are disproportionately targeted for Islamophobic abuse due to visible markers of faith. The Equality Act 2010 should be amended to strengthen religious exemptions, safeguarding Islamic dress, gender-segregated spaces, and faith-based employment practices; such amendments would ensure that Muslim women can freely express their faith without fear of discrimination.
5. Funding should be allocated to Muslim-led mediation services to address intra-community disputes without state interference; framing Islamic or Muslim councils as 'parallel legal systems' overlooks their essential role in providing Muslim women with faith-sensitive solutions to disputes voluntarily, thereby preventing the need to push them into the court system.
6. Policies like PREVENT exacerbate gendered Islamophobia by disproportionately targeting Muslim communities, particularly women, under the guise of combating extremism; by mislabelling traditional Islamic values—such as modesty, gender segregation, and parental guardianship—as 'extremist,' these policies stigmatise

everyday religious practices. This not only alienates Muslim women but also reinforces stereotypes of Muslim men as oppressive and Muslim women as needing ‘saving.’ Such securitisation fosters mistrust in state institutions; it discourages Muslim women from seeking support and perpetuates the narrative that Islam itself is a threat, further marginalising Muslim women in society.

7. The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022 criminalises marriage under 18, even with parental consent, disproportionately affecting young Muslim women. This forces them into secrecy or cohabitation, denying them the agency to marry while allowing 16-year-olds to consent to medical procedures, join the military, or work full-time; this contradiction reflects a systemic distrust of their autonomy.

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