



How do British Muslims transmit the faith to their children?

Muslims in Britain are amongst the most successful of religious groups in transmitting their religion to the next generation. Over 77% of adult Muslims say they practice the religion they were brought up in compared to 29% of Christians. This research finds that far from relying on schools and the state to nurture religious knowledge, Muslims actively take things into their own hands. Parents and grandparents work together to make sure their children learn about the faith in the home and special classes. And some of these classes are seen as 'fun' by the children. Jonathan Scourfield and his team at Cardiff University, in a project funded by the [Religion and Society Programme](#), came to these findings by analyzing the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey and working with Muslim families in Cardiff. They interviewed 60 families, including 99 parents and 120 children aged twelve and under, from a range of Islamic schools of thought and ethnic backgrounds. In 24 families children also kept a mix of oral and video diaries, and the team observed Islamic education classes.

They found that all but one of the families who had children old enough arranged for them to learn to read the Qur'an in Arabic (starting as young as 5 years old). Many children attend religious education classes at least three times a week, and are generally very knowledgeable about Islam. The children describe learning to be a Muslim as learning a set of rules, and they focus on concrete details and dramatic stories. Within families, mothers are typically the main teachers, with some fathers' work making it very difficult to spend time with their children. In some mixed ethnicity families and smaller ethnic groups, parents have to work out religious nurture for themselves. TV, DVDs, Internet and Islamic songs help support children's learning about Islam.

Both parents and children appreciate Qur'an, Arabic and Islamic studies classes which are 'fun'. They tend to prefer schools with a good mix of ethnicities and religions, plus a number of Muslim children. State primary schools are perceived as involving quite a lot of Christian content and Christmas is described as a particularly challenging time of year for the families. Parents appreciate the lack of harassment in Cardiff overall and the increase in facilities available for Muslims since their own childhoods. All the families interviewed shared a commitment to Islam, though some criticised particular mosques, especially for lack of facilities for women. The project suggests that if religion is central to children's routines, and they spend their time in Islamic places (including home), then their faith is likely to become central to their identity. Strong social networks seem to reinforce Muslims' identification with Islam. Being in a minority, with hostility coming from the media and elsewhere, might also strengthen a Muslim identity. The frequent repetition of religious terms and texts makes for effective transmission of religion.

The project ran a series of innovative dissemination and 'thank you' events for the families who participated, and for the wider community, including a Family Fun Day. It also offered some practical suggestions arising from the research, such as mosques making themselves more accessible to women and girls, and provision of homework clubs after school integrating some religious education.

Find out more...

- Read an accessible summary of the project providing greater detail:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2010_06/1276680685_Scourfield_Project_Findings_Booklet.pdf
- Visit the project's website: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/research/researchprojects/religiousnurture/>
- See a little bit about the *Family Fun Day* the team ran on 20th June 2010 in Cardiff for local Muslim families including bouncy castles, face painting and the chance to learn more about the project:
<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/newsandevents/events/20062010.html> and the free practitioner seminar on 24th June 2010, also in Cardiff, designed to increase the knowledge base of education, health and social care staff in relation to working with Muslim children and their families:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/events/programme_events/show/working_with_muslim_children_and_their_families_a_free_practitioner_seminar
- Keep an eye out for the book *Muslim Childhood* to be published on the project by Oxford University Press in 2012.

You might also be interested in...

- The Muslim Chaplains Research Project also funded by the Religion and Society Programme and run by this project's co-investigator Sophie Gilliat-Ray:
<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/share/research/centres/csi/research/muslimchaplainsproject/index.html>
- Reading about the findings of another Religion and Society project about opting out of Religious Education in Northern Ireland:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/opting_out_of_re_could_and_should_be_easier
- A report about teaching about world religions in schools in England co-authored by Bob Jackson, Julia Ipgrave, Mandy Robbins, Leslie Francis and Ursula McKenna who work on Religion and Society Phase 2 Large Grant '[Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity](http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2010_02/1265114944_DCSF-RR197.pdf)':
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2010_02/1265114944_DCSF-RR197.pdf
- The final report from Mark Pike's project investigating British Christian ethos schools:
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2010_01/1262795461_ESRCAHRCPIkeReport.pdf

Project Details

Award Title

Religious nurture in Muslim families

Team

Principal Investigator: Dr Jonathan Scourfield (Cardiff)



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Co-Investigator: Dr Sophie Gilliat-Ray (Cardiff)

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Research Partners

Organisations including the Muslim Council of Wales, SOBIS (School of Basic Islamic Studies) and the Pakistani Educational and Cultural Association have advised the project and helped with recruitment.

Award Type

Phase 1 Large Grant

Key terms

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