
Advancing Institutional Workforce Equity: Insights From Muslim Physicians in Academic Medicine

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The ultimate goal is to ensure that people from all backgrounds are fully integrated, fully engaged, and fully empowered.¹



Illustrated are the three dimensions (diversity, inclusion, equity), including their documented benefits, needed for an academic health center to achieve excellence.

The Challenge of Achieving Workforce Equity

- Workplace discrimination negatively impacts minority physicians' career trajectories and well-being^{2, 3}
- Little is known about religion-related discrimination & accommodation
 - Previous study showed Muslim physicians experienced religious discrimination frequently during their career⁴

Why is this not the “natural” picture of clinicians in academic medicine?



Study Objectives

- Examine Muslim physicians' experiences with discrimination and accommodation
- Identify barriers to the inclusion of Muslim physicians within academic medicine



Methods



- Community-engaged research approach⁶
 - Islamic Medical Association of North America
 - American Muslim Health Professionals
 - US Muslim Physicians group
- Maximum variation purposive sampling for diversity in racial/ethnic, and sex characteristics and workplace discrimination experiences

Participant characteristics (n=18)

Age: mean = 41.5 [29-77]

Sex: Female = 11

Race/Ethnicity:

- S. Asian=13
- Arab = 5

Attend medical school in US

- Yes=10

Years in practice: mean = 12.83 [1-56]

Religious Importance:

- Most important part of life=12; Very= 4

Organization:

- IMANA= 12
- AMHP= 4; US Muslim Physicians group= 2

Perceived religious discrimination:

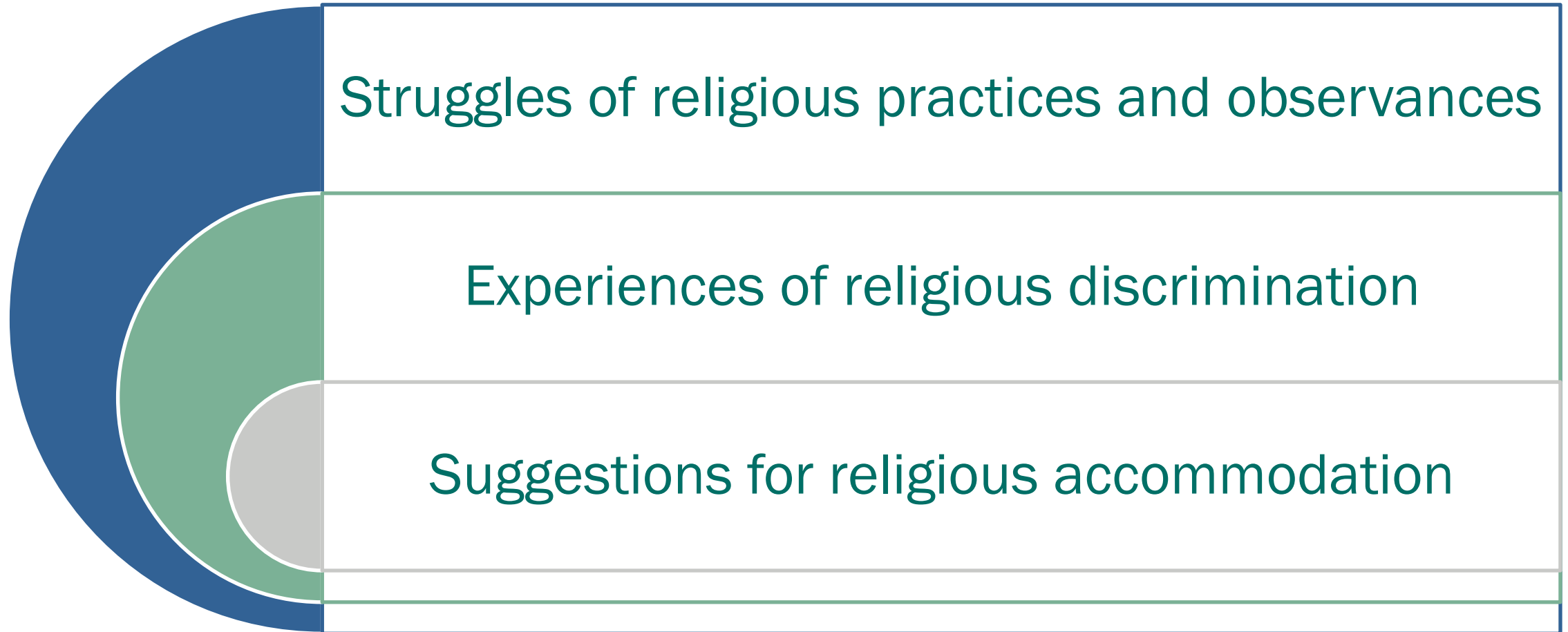
- High religious discrimination= 9
- Low religious discrimination= 9

Perceived religious accommodation:

- High religious accommodation= 12
- Low religious accommodation= 6



Salient Themes



Struggles of religious practices

Ramadan fasting

- *“I usually ask supervisors... This is going to be Ramadan from this time to this time, can you put me on an easier rotation?...some years it will happen, some years it doesn’t” -South Asian female*

Daily prayers

- *“If I get a break from 12:00 to 1:00 for lunch...I can go pray. Otherwise, I’ll [struggle] to find time in the middle of a busy clinic.” -South Asian male*

Friday prayers

- *“Co-workers have questioned **why I take two hours lunch break for Fridays**, and then my manager has to give an explanation” –South Asian male*

Struggles of religious observances

Diet

- *“I’m always marginalized because most of the events...contain alcohol. They don’t really cater for my dietary choices” –Arab female*

Holidays

- *“I worked Christmas for seven years, but I never had coverage for Eid or had that considered by anybody” -South Asian male*

Dress

- *“In medical school when I was scrubbing into the OR, there were some nurses who would really give me a hard time about wearing a long-sleeved shirt under my scrubs or about wearing a hijab into the OR. I didn’t want to think it was religious discrimination” Arab female*

Experiences of religious discrimination

Levels of discrimination

- *“If anything bad happens, I will be easily a goat sacrifice, nobody would care. There’s nobody in the **leadership that would stand by your back.** There’s no group to protect you. There’s no system established for even religious biases, or training, or anything like that”-Arab female*

Action

- *“I even actually went to our university’s dean of faculty affairs and I went to HR and I was like, “I feel like I’m being discriminated,” but no one did anything about it, no one did”- South Asian female*

Impact

- ***I’m just fed up.** The reason I stayed here so long is **I love what I do...I can do both seeing patients as a clinician and do research...but if they didn’t treat me this way, I wouldn’t have left, but after 15 years, I’ve had enough” – South Asian female***

Suggestions: D&I Enhancement & Religious Accommodation

Prayers

"Having the right to accommodate their schedules on Fridays or on a daily basis, like breaks at prayer time for 5 or 10 minutes"-South Asian male

Ramadan & holidays

"I think accommodations for Muslim obligations or holidays without question or without the provider needing to figure it out."-South Asian male

Dietary preferences

"Accommodations when you are ordering food for any occasion. You need to take into account to have some halal or vegetarian option and not have pork products."-South Asian, female

Dress code

They should have a policy; every institution should have a policy about hijāb in the OR."-Arab female

Faith based liaison

"A liaison, one or two people that will represent the Muslim community or the Muslim physicians...communicating liaison to see about the concerns, to share the concern."-Arab male

Workplace equity

"Every promotion, every job, and every grant is open too. I should have as much access to it like anybody else, but it's not assumed that I wouldn't be interested."-South Asian female

Implications

Negative experiences →

- Leaving the academy
- Declinations in religious practice
- Psychological distress
- (-) Workforce equity



Questions



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Concept of religious discrimination

- *“using someone else’s religion against them as a barrier to their progress or allowing them to go ahead, as a barrier to achievement or (as) a barrier to success”* (South Asian, male).
- *“if a person who celebrates a holiday that’s not on the official holiday calendar is not given permission to have the day off...Not being given a place or a space to perform their religious duties like prayer...restricting their ability to dress in the way that their religion mandates”* (Arab, female).
- Most participants reflected this concept into experiences
 - Negative reactions to their outward religious appearance, their held religious values, or their attempts to practice.

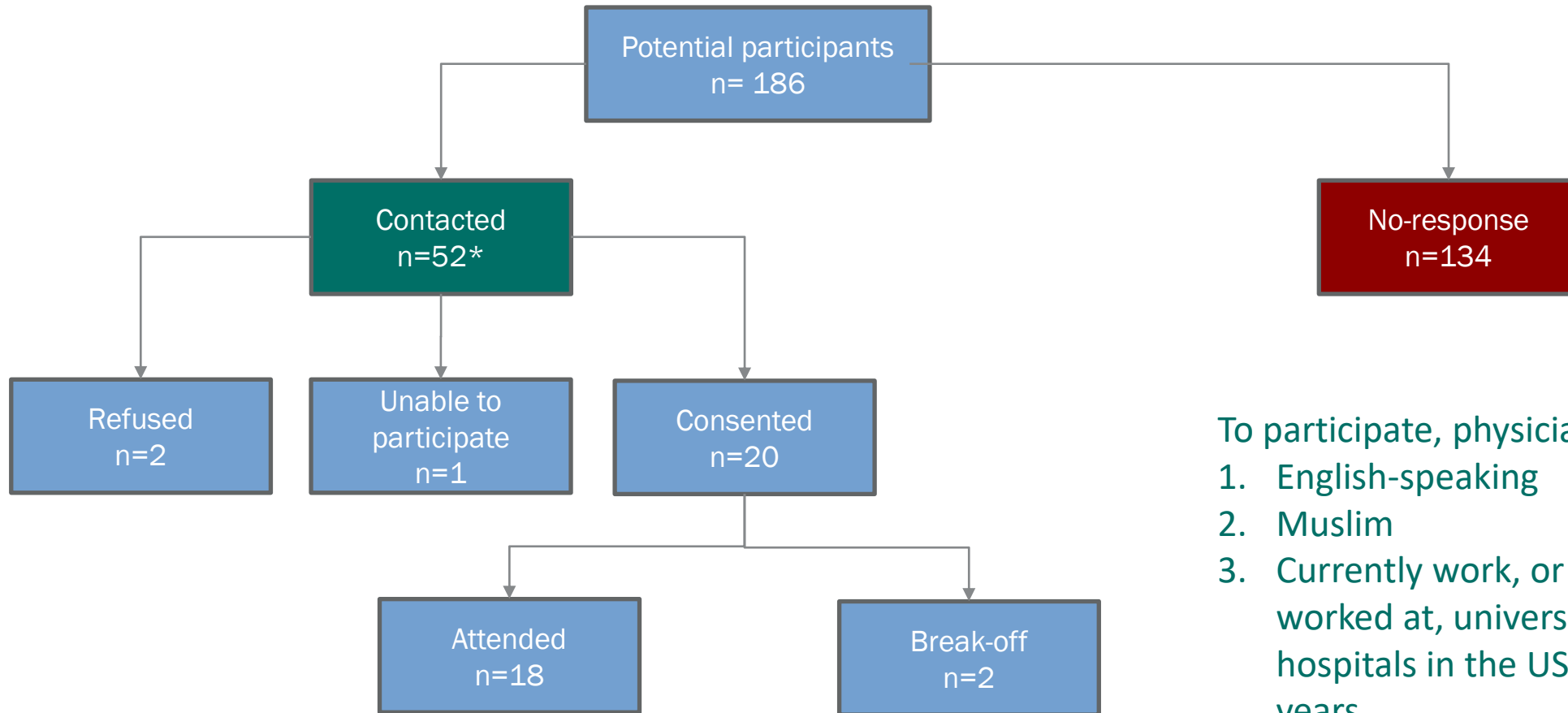
Actions taken against religious discrimination

- Participants took both formal (n=11) and informal (n=3) actions.
 - Reporting incidences to deans, human resources, chief operating officers, department chairs or other leaders.
 - One participant filed a legal complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Despite speaking up and escalating their issues to superiors, participants(n=6) were dissatisfied with their organization's responses.
 - *“That’s why I wanted part of this study, because I feel like...if something happens to us (Muslims), we don’t really talk about it...I even actually went to our university’s dean of faculty affairs and I complained to them about it and I actually went to HR and I was like, “I feel like I’m being discriminated,” but no one did anything about it, no one did”* (Participant 306, South Asian, female).
- Those who did not make formal complaints did so because they felt the process was cumbersome and/or they feared repercussions.

Interview Domains

Theme	Questions
Religious Identity & Practices at Work	How does religion inform your identity?
	<p>Given all you shared above about religious practices, observances, and the like, how do they intersect with your work life?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up: Do you have to actively manage these religious practices or observances at work? How do you go about doing so?
Religious Discrimination	Have you experienced religious discrimination in your profession?
	How was your experience in training and residency?
Religious Accommodation	How is, or has been, your religious identity (practices, observances, and values) accommodated at work?
	How have your experiences impacted your work life, career trajectory and personal life?
Policies & Best Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What accommodations on an individual level do you think are important to secure? • What policies or actions could hospitals take that are essential to make Muslim physicians as a group more accommodated at work?

Participant flowchart



To participate, physicians had to be:

1. English-speaking
2. Muslim
3. Currently work, or have previously worked at, university-affiliated hospitals in the US within the past 20 years

Sampling

- Sorting questions:
 - I personally experience discrimination in my current workplace
 - My workplace accommodates my religious identity

