

MICHIGAN

Study: Rate of discrimination against Muslim doctors has doubled since 2013

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Discrimination against Muslim doctors is on the rise, according to a study by the Initiative on Islam and Medicine and the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Discrimination rates were already alarming in a 2013 study, said one of the researchers, Aasim Padela, a professor at the Medical College of Wisconsin and the vice chair for research and scholarship in the emergency medicine department.

But in 2021, the percent of Muslim doctors who reported sometimes experiencing discrimination doubled, rising from 19% to 41%, according to the study, which was published Wednesday in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. Some 12% of Muslim doctors reported often or always experiencing discrimination, compared to 5% in 2013.

"The problem here is that physicians are themselves feeling not welcome in the environment," Padela said. "When that happens, it has downstream effects on their own health as well. ... It's horrible that our healthcare system is not working for patients well enough, not working for providers well enough and it's not working for society."

More than 15% of licensed medical doctors in Michigan are Muslim, according to research from the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, which has offices in Dearborn and Washington, D.C.

Large percentages of doctors reported experiencing religious discrimination, job turnover and having patients refuse their care because of their religion, according to the study from the Initiative on Islam and Medicine and the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Muzammil Ahmed, a doctor at what had been known as Beaumont Health and chairman of the Michigan Muslim Community Council, said while he himself has not experienced discrimination because of his religion, he has heard the complaint come up on occasion.

Ahmed said Metro Detroit is a privileged environment because of the number of doctors from multiple ethnicities.

"I think one reason metro Detroit is such a big hub for not just Muslims, but all ethnic backgrounds, is because it's very welcoming," Ahmed said. "Detroit's a great, welcoming place for people of different backgrounds. Generally we don't have much of a problem."

Even so, he said, there is always more work to be done. He said he thinks women physicians may experience discrimination at work, as well as racial- or ethnic-based issues.

"Usually we can win people over with competency and compassion," Ahmed said. "People come to us for help. When we provide that help, it really breaks down stereotypes and prejudices people have."

In 2013, 24% of Muslim doctors said they have been passed over for professional advancement because of their religion and 7% said they left a job due to discrimination, according to the study released this week. That number rose to 57% who had been passed over and 32% who left a job in 2021.

Padela said he hopes broad dissemination of the research will lead to improvements in equity for Muslim physicians. He said he wished more diversity programs focused on religious diversity as well as racial and gender diversity.

"From a personal standpoint, such individuals experience greater burnout, are more likely to be depressed and have poorer social relationships with colleagues," according to the study. "When physicians suffer in these ways, patient care also suffers due to dissatisfaction and possible negative effects on work performance. Thus, the 'costs' of workplace discrimination on physicians, patients, and the overall healthcare system are high."

While the respondents in the 2021 survey trended younger, the rise in discrimination was seen in every age group and region in the U.S., Padela said.

Younger people are less tolerant of discrimination and are more likely to report it because they don't believe they should be treated that way, he added. Older people and immigrants, who made up a large part of the 2013 study, might not have wanted to rock the boat. "For them, just trying to fit into the health care environment might have been the goal and they were ignoring everything else," Padela said.

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